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Literacy in Selected Schools: Review of a Program for Students With Severe Delays in Reading and Writing

by

Larry Gordon Payne ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Educational Psychology

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Literacy in Selected Schools: Review of a Program for Students With Severe Delays in Reading and Writing** submitted by Larry Gordon Payne in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This study investigated the implementation of one school board's alternative literacy program, developed to address the needs of students who were seen to be displaying severe delays in reading and writing, this segregated educational program is entitled 'Basic Literacy.' The school board initiative was part of a general plan to enhance service delivery for students. Designed by a committee of school board senior administrators (central office and principals), the program was piloted for a two-year period in 12 schools during 1997-1999.

The objectives of this study were to chart literacy performance for the original 118 students enrolled in the Basic Literacy program, to determine whether a theoretical framework of literacy learning was evident in the instruction within the Basic Literacy program, and to determine which elements of the Basic Literacy program affected literacy competence. The inquiry was conducted as a case study limited to the first two (pilot) years of the Basic Literacy program.

The study provided an opportunity for both a quantitative and qualitative investigation of the efficacy of the program. The quantitative component of the study utilized the school district's Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) reading comprehension scores to measure literacy competence. The naturalistic inquiry examined the attitudinal responses to a questionnaire administered to students, parents, administrators and teachers in the program. Three Basic Literacy teachers were interviewed using an in-depth interviewing technique.

The findings of the study indicate that although reading comprehension appeared to improve for the Basic Literacy students, it could not be demonstrated with confidence because of administrative problems with the HLAT. Common instructional practices were discovered across Basic Literacy sites that were commensurate with successful literacy practices. The contextual variables inherent in the development, implementation

and delivery of the program had a direct impact on the academic results and outcomes of the program. These included school-level variables such as parental support and strict adherence to enrollment capacities and district-level variables including curriculum flexibility and class size. Overall, stakeholder perceptions indicated general satisfaction with the Basic Literacy program.

Dedicated to the memory of my aunt,
Sylvia Margaret Christensen
who believed in me from the beginning

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

> *Becoming literate in the modern world is indeed an increasingly complex task. Reading and writing abilities don't just happen. They are acquired, nurtured and refined through the acts of those who provide appropriate instructional contexts and support. (Strickland, 1999)*

Introduction

Literacy fluctuates within and across cultural contexts. A literacy gap (i.e., the difference between a culture's actual and desired level of literacy for its members; Harris & Hodges, 1981) appears to reflect the economic and political climate in any given culture during a particular period of time (Resnick & Resnick, 1977). Historically, the pendulum of literacy competence has swung from a position where the acquisition of literacy was available only to the elite, to one where some level of literacy might be attained by all; through to the Western hemisphere's "contemporary expectation [of] high levels of literacy for the entire population" (p. 47).

Literacy has been variously defined as the ability to pronounce words, phrases, and sentences; the ability to sign one's name on a marriage certificate; the ability to complete a specified number of years' exposure to school learning; and the self-reported ability to read and write a simple message (National Institute of Education, 1989). In Canada literacy competence has been equated with five years of formal education during the 1960s, eight years during the 1970s (Cairns, 1977), and nine years during the 1980s. Speculation has arisen whether even 12 years of formal education sufficiently equips a student to meet expanding literacy requirements, which now encompass technological demands.

Recently, Cambourne (2001) considered literacy to be an umbrella term that encompasses a whole range of behaviors depending on which ideology or set of values one carries. Cambourne identified three distinct categories or beliefs about the kind of literacy in which schools should be engaging. The first is *functional literacy* and is based on assumptions about society, learning, and language. It assumes that schools have the responsibility for graduating students literate enough to understand and cope with basic signs, newspapers, and official forms. It was believed that once this basic form of functional literacy had been acquired, it could be applied to any domain or knowledge or concern, and was therefore a necessary prerequisite for success in later learning.

The second category of literacy identified by Cambourne (2001) is *literacy for personal growth and personal development*. This type of literacy demands the ability to understand and apply the issues, conflicts, and themes in great works of literature. It assumes that by encouraging creativity, students will develop self-knowledge and that this kind of discovery is an essential component of personal growth. The third category of literacy identified by Cambourne is *literacy for social equity and social justice*, sometimes referred to as critical social literacy. This considers literacy as inherently political in that literacy should be equated with high degrees of control of language in all of its forms.

As a result of Cambourne's (1995) 20 years of inquiry into literacy learning, he has identified conditions of learning and how they might apply to literacy teaching. This theory of literacy education is based on several conditions of learning, which include *immersion* in that which is to be learned, *demonstration* and the ability to observe, *engagement* or active participation by the learner, *expectations* as essential messages that are sent to the learner, *responsibility* in making decisions, *employment* or use and practice of information, *approximations* of the desired model, and *response* or receiving feedback.

During the previous two decades, the evolving nature of literacy has impacted both school systems and students. In an attempt to assist with improving the literacy competence of students, one urban school district established a Basic Literacy program in 1997. Within the current study, critical elements of the Basic Literacy program, including implementation, classroom instruction, school culture, and the nature of literacy, were examined. Cambourne's (1995, 2001) definitions of literacy and conditions of learning as applied to literacy teaching were employed as the lens through which the Basic Literacy program was investigated.

Aim of the Basic Literacy Study

Schools, as "transmitters of culture" (Spindler, 1984, p. 126), are, or should be, intrinsically aware of the societal value placed on literacy competence and their role in helping children acquire literacy skills. Most children attain literacy competence prior to concluding their formal education. Their literacy competence is a product of interactions across home, community, and school contexts. However, there remains a substantial number of children whose daily contacts with print result in frustration and a feeling of personal failure (Kirk, Klieban, & Lerner, 1988).

It was evident to those within the school district that established the Basic Literacy program that regular school programming had not facilitated literacy competence for a certain proportion of its student population. The Basic Literacy program was designed as a two-year intensive program to target those students enrolled in Grades 4 through 9 whose reading comprehension and writing skills were considerably below those of their contemporaries.

The primary objectives of the study were to chart literacy performance for the original 118 students enrolled in the Basic Literacy program, to determine whether a theoretical framework of literacy learning was evident in the Basic Literacy instruction, and to determine which elements of the Basic Literacy program improved literacy competence. Multiple sources of data, including student achievement, teacher beliefs, teacher classroom methods, and the culture of the urban school district, were examined. The research methodologies utilized to study the phenomenon of interest were both qualitative and quantitative.

The Basic Literacy Program

The complete Basic Literacy program expectations, as established by the school district, are cited in Appendix A. Several of the program expectations are highlighted below; they provide a context for the ensuing research. The Basic Literacy program goals include:

- to increase literacy skills to a level that enables the student to succeed in a less restrictive environment;
- to improve learning skills such as selection of appropriate strategies, organization, and planning;
- to help students understand their learning problems and be an advocate for themselves in the classroom; and
- to develop positive attitudes towards school and learning.

In order to achieve the program goals, the school district streamlined the instructional process, with language arts and mathematics being the targeted areas of instruction for students in Grades 4 to 9. Essentially, the student's instructional day was to be filled with language and numeracy-related activities.

The Basic Literacy program organizational criteria include:

- class size one half or less of regular class size in the school for academic core (not to exceed 14 students);
- academic study for two-thirds or more of the school day;
- one teacher responsible for the academic core to facilitate integration of curricular content with literacy skill development;
- ungraded program; social studies and science topics and concepts reduced; and
- emphasis on acquisition of basic concepts and applications rather than higher level thinking skills.

No formal definition or theoretical framework of literacy was established at the onset of the program. However, as noted in the organizational criteria listed above, it clearly stated *emphasis on acquisition of basic concepts and applications*. This statement indicates the central and philosophical tenets of literacy upon which the language program was to be based. Students with demonstrated delays in language (reading comprehension, reading decoding, and written language) were admitted to the program, with classroom instruction to be based on their current capacities and not their actual grade level of enrollment.

Student entrance to the program was based on the following criteria:

- the assessment of reading comprehension, reading decoding, and written language below the fifth percentile in all three areas, and below the first percentile in two areas on a standardized tool that was not multiple choice;
- the recommended psychometrics for this assessment included: Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT-R), Test of Written Language (TOWL-2), Test of Adolescent Language (TOAL-2), Test of Early Written Language (TEWL), Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT), Woodcock Johnson Psychoeducational Battery (WJPEB), Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (K-TEA), Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT-R);
- HLAT (Highest Level of Achievement Test) scores in reading and writing delayed by three or more years in Division II (elementary school, Grade 3 and beyond) and four or more years in Division III (junior high school). The HLAT was established as a local set of tests for the urban school district;
- a full-scale IQ score of 80+ as measured on a current IQ test;
- a minimum of three years in English language instruction; and
- exclusion of students who are rated as exhibiting aggressive behaviors.

Twelve sites (seven elementary and five junior high) were selected to implement the Basic Literacy program. Each school was required to employ teachers and teaching assistants with strong backgrounds in special education and/or reading.

The teachers involved in the Basic Literacy program were expected to fulfill the following criteria:

- expertise in reading development,
- special education training,
- five or more years of teaching experience, and
- elementary educational background preferred for junior high school instruction.

The teachers were required to achieve the goals of the Basic Literacy program in whichever manner best suited their students and their personal teaching style.

Literacy Education Reform

Substantial effort on the part of school boards, teachers, reading specialists, psychologists, and parents has been expended on children who find reading a difficult task, often with few positive results (Barr, 1996). As a result, critical examinations of educational reforms and schools, including their operations and their accomplishments, are essential. Falk-Ross (2002) asserted that the following questions should be at the forefront of any literacy reform: How can we limit the impact of literacy difficulties on students' future educational achievement? What adaptations or modifications in teaching and learning activities and routines will elicit and benefit students' language constructions within everyday instructional activities? Who is responsible for creating and facilitating alternative strategies for these students' success? Falk-Ross believed that these questions would guide and assist in the creation of a working rationale and applicable methods for improving the quantity and quality of support for students with literacy difficulties.

Research Questions

The Basic Literacy program was conceptualized as one type of literacy reform; therefore, the Falk-Ross (2002) assertions were instrumental in the development of the Basic Literacy research questions.

1. Was there an overall improvement in reading comprehension performance during the first two years of the Basic Literacy program (1997-1999)? Were there differences between the junior high school and elementary school performances?

2. How did the reading comprehension scores of students in the elementary and junior high Basic Literacy program compare with those of schoolmates in the regular elementary and junior high program?

3. Which teaching strategies appeared to be employed in the Basic Literacy classroom?

4. Were the teaching strategies employed commensurate with proven successful literacy learning practices?

5. What other site (school) level variables, if any, affected instruction within the Basic Literacy program?

6. What school district level variables, if any affected the delivery of the Basic Literacy program?

7. Overall, were educational stakeholders (administration, staff, students, parents, and community) satisfied with the Basic Literacy program?

Research Method

The study of the Basic Literacy program provided an opportunity for both a quantitative and a qualitative investigation. Hillison (1990) asserted that the two categories of research (quantitative and qualitative) are not alien to each other; in fact, virtually every researcher routinely practices aspects of each. In the last few years, the philosophical debate over quantitative versus qualitative research has begun to shift to a belief that a synthesis of the two approaches is superior to either (Redmann, Lambrecht, & Stitt-Gohdes, 2000).

The quantitative aspect of this Basic Literacy study included transferring achievement data into an Excel program and analysis through the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) program. A significant portion of this analysis utilized the Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) reading comprehension scores. A repeated measures analysis (ANOVA) was initially proposed; however, as the analysis transpired, it became apparent (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) that the HLAT was not statistically rigorous enough for a repeated measure analysis. Thus, the HLAT statistical data are presented in a descriptive manner demonstrating grade level of improvement between the two groups in an attempt to quantify improved literacy competence.

The naturalistic inquiry into the Basic Literacy program was conducted as a case study. Schloss and Smith (1999) asserted that case studies allow one to focus on a single instance of a current phenomenon in its total context. The research conducted on the Basic Literacy program was well suited to the case study approach. That is, the first two years (1997-1999) of the Basic Literacy program were considered to be one case. Further, the case study approach allowed the study of the Basic Literacy program as the events unfolded. Typically, case studies involve multiple data sources, including discussions with the participants, direct observations, and analysis of written documents.

This study examined the attitudinal responses (questionnaires) of Basic Literacy students, parents, administrators, and teachers. Three Basic Literacy teachers were interviewed through an in-depth interviewing technique. The interviews were analyzed, categorized into themes, and coded into the eight conditions of literacy learning using the critical incident technique (Redmann et al., 2000). The identified themes and coding results were given back to the Basic Literacy teachers for inter-rater agreement. These data were then triangulated with the participant-observation data gathered from the Basic Literacy classrooms. The nature of literacy itself has been identified as changing and evolving; thus the examination of the Basic Literacy program was well suited to a naturalistic inquiry.

Data Analysis

Inherent in the development and implementation of the Basic Literacy program was the belief that spending two years in the program would allow students to be successfully integrated into a less restrictive environment with their age-appropriate peers. An analysis of the Basic Literacy students' improvement in achievement and a comparison to the academic gains of their peers in the regular program over the same time period was warranted. Therefore, the data utilized to address the first two research questions was gathered from the achievement data of the original 118 literacy students.

No theory of literacy was employed during the implementation of the Basic Literacy program. In this study, Cambourne's (2001) theoretical framework was selected as a guide in analyzing the teachers' literacy practices for two reasons. First, Cambourne qualified as a literacy expert through his two decades of inquiry into the field of literacy issues. Second, the impetus for Cambourne's work in this realm had been driven by the desire to create an educationally relevant theory of literacy education. In this manner, Cambourne was one theorist who, in collaboration with teachers, applied his theories in actual classrooms. This allowed the identification of the eight conditions to capture both philosophical and practical tenets of literacy learning in classrooms. The data utilized to address the third and fourth research questions were gathered from Basic Literacy attitudinal surveys, Basic Literacy teacher interviews, and participant observations in two Basic Literacy classrooms.

Improving student achievement and classroom teaching are fundamental to all educational organizations. Yet the organizational context of each school district is as unique and varied as are the classrooms. The context of the school district, which established the Basic Literacy program, had a direct effect on the outcomes of the program. Therefore, investigation into the organizational context of the school district was warranted and resulted in the development of the fifth, sixth, and seventh research questions. The data to address these questions were gathered from the Basic Literacy attitudinal surveys and Basic Literacy teacher interviews.

Specific Context of the Basic Literacy Program

The school district that developed and implemented the Basic Literacy program, based its administration on the principles of site-based management. Historically, the school board has been at the forefront of educational reform by being one of the first school districts to implement decentralized budgeting. This new paradigm was implemented in varying stages. In 1979 fiscal authority for staff, supplies, and equipment was transferred to schools; fiscal authority for consulting services was subsequently transferred to the schools. Following the consulting services transfer in 1986, fiscal authority for maintenance services was decentralized in 1989. In 1995 a new superintendent was appointed to the school district.

During the next six years (1995-2001) further changes occurred in the evolution of the school district's reform. These changes included principals being considered senior staff, which carried with it more involvement in district decision and policy making. Most recently, this reform has been referred to as "site-based decision making," with guidelines developed collaboratively between the school district and the local teachers' union. This collaboration resulted in the local teachers association publishing *Framework for involvement in site-based decision making* (2000). It was within this context that the Basic Literacy program was conceived in 1997.

Further, the researcher was a school principal within the urban school district and was involved in the initial development stages of the Basic Literacy program. This involvement led to the researcher's piloting the Basic Literacy program for the first two years (1997-1999). During those two years, the researcher had first-hand observations of the Basic Literacy program. The researcher visited a Basic Literacy classroom daily and several other district Basic Literacy classrooms over the course of the two years, and participated in administrative meetings and professional development for the Basic Literacy teachers.

Relevance for Education

Hoing (2001) asserted that the first and foremost job of elementary schools is to teach children to read.

> The reading program in every school should enable almost every student to be able to read and understand grade-appropriate material by the end of elementary school; to have read a large number of books and informational text; to reach high levels of comprehension ability; and to enjoy reading. (p. 4)

It is commonly believed (Carver, 2000) that these goals can be achieved only if most students are able to decode and read beginning material by the mid first grade and have perfected these basic skills to tackle more difficult texts by third grade. Most students who fail to learn to read by this time are destined to fall farther and farther behind in school and are effectively prevented from capitalizing on the power of education to improve and enrich their lives (Juel, 1988, 1994; Stanovich, 1986, 1993).

Yet large numbers of students do not become readers early enough to develop the skills and experience to read age-appropriate materials throughout their elementary careers and are, in effect, excluded from the benefits of instruction. Access to further education, high-skilled jobs, and a chance to participate fully as informed citizens depends in large part on school success, which itself is highly correlated with the ability to read (Carver, 2000). Educators must critically examine current reading practices, identify the most successful programs, and then enlist teachers, parents, and leaders responsible for educating children in the common goal of remedying difficulties with literacy competence.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of study and explains the background to the problem. This includes the context of the Basic Literacy program, the research method, questions, and their relevance for education. Chapter 2 provides a review of scholarship in the fields of literacy reading intervention programs. The chapter is presented around the three contexts of the Basic Literacy program: the historical context, the research context, and the organizational context. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design and methodological procedure chosen for the investigation. Chapter 4 describes how the research design was applied to the Basic Literacy study. In this manner the chapter provides descriptions of the participants and classroom environment. The delimitations, limitations, and ethical considerations are also presented. Chapter 5 provides the findings of the study. This includes the quantitative data, attitudinal survey data, and teacher interview data. Last, Chapter 6 states the findings in terms of the specific research questions that guided the study. Conclusions and recommendations are also provided in the final section.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study includes exemplars of the latest scholarship in the fields of literacy and reading intervention programs. The chapter is organized around the three 'contexts' of the Basic Literacy program: (a) historical, (b) research, and (c) organizational.

Historical Context of the Basic Literacy Program

Too often, school structure is determined by tradition and routine (Strauss & Irvin, 2000). In the case of elementary schools, the traditional route has been to channel children who struggle with literacy competence into some form of remedial programming. The school board that established the Basic Literacy program had previously provided instruction for students with language delays under the label of 'adaptation.' Adaptation students were elementary and junior high children with average cognitive abilities who displayed one- to two-year learning lags in their literacy skills. The adaptation program was conceived as a resource room or a segregated program; however, growing fiscal restraints resulted in increased integration of the 'adaptation' students.

Another source of pressure for the school district was an increase in the number of students who were delayed in their literacy competence. In 1985, 1,573 students were coded 'adaptation,' but by 1996, 4,370 students had this label, as reported by the urban school board (Edmonton Public Schools, 1996). This constituted a 178% increase over a 10-year period. In the spring of 1996, principals of adaptation centers met to discuss the adaptation program, its effectiveness, and the implications of the enrolment increase. There was general agreement that with a broadening of the criteria over the years, the adaptation category served students with such diverse characteristics and needs that it was no longer meaningful as either a program or an eligibility category. Over 6% of all school-age students in 1995 were identified as 'adaptation,' and of all students identified as having a learning disability, over 54% were coded as 'adaptation' (March 1996).

Two large-scale district initiatives were undertaken to address the concerns regarding delayed literacy competence. These initiatives were put forth to the Superintendent of Schools in a 1996 report from district personnel. The first initiative was to establish an early reading incentive program. The early reading incentive program was conceptualized by the school board as a proactive measure, rather than a reactive attempt, to provide assistance for children with literacy difficulties. The premise of the early reading incentive program was that if more fiscal resources were deployed in early education, all children would be able to read at grade level by the end of Grade 3. As a result, fiscal resources were moved from the high school level to the elementary level to be utilized in kindergarten to Grade 3 programs.

The second initiative proposed that district centers for adaptation be discontinued, because the regular graded curriculum that was used was not appropriate for students with reading deficits. Even with modifications to pace and strategies, a number of students categorized as 'adaptation' remained nonreaders and unable to cope with curricular demands. In combination with the establishment of the early reading incentive program, the adaptation category was removed at the Grade 1 to 3 levels. The Grade 4 to 9 adaptation programs were eventually phased out as the two-year intensive Basic Literacy program was established and implemented.

Research Context of the Basic Literacy Program

Research pertaining to the multiple elements inherent in this study was considered within seven categories. These included (a) definition of literacy, (b) theoretical framework of literacy, (c) acquisition of literacy, (d) predictors of literacy achievement, (e) literacy program interventions, (f) literacy and motivation, and

(g) classroom literacy instruction. There have been a number of investigations in each of these areas.

Definition of Literacy

Because the urban school district that developed the Basic Literacy program identified no definition of literacy, the Basic Literacy data were examined within the framework of Cambourne's (2001) three categories of literacy. As previously noted by this author, literacy is often an umbrella term employed in educational settings. On the one hand, most specialists would agree that the term connotes aspects of reading and writing; on the other hand, major debates continue to revolve around such issues as what specific abilities or knowledge count as literacy and what 'levels' can and should be defined for measurement. However, researchers have identified varying definitions of literacy over the past two decades. Cambourne's recent definitions of literacy were employed in this study. They included (a) functional literacy, (b) literacy for personal growth and development, and (c) literacy for social equity and social justice.

Functional Literacy

Historically and in the broadest sense, literacy has been defined in terms of potential outcomes of being literate. Spindler (1984) discussed ways in which being literate allowed individuals to adapt to changing situations, to gain control over their affairs, and to develop their self-esteem. The metaphor of *literacy for adaptation* received the most attention under the label of *functional literacy*. Specifically, functional literacy referred to those applications necessary to survive or to cope in situations in which text is used to communicate needed information (Kirsch & Guthrie, 1978).

Access to information was a central tenet in Levine's (1982) definition of both literacy and functional literacy. Levine suggested that literacy becomes the capacity to acquire and exchange information via the written word, whereas functional literacy is taken to be the possession of, or access to, the competencies and information required when accomplishing those transactions. Therefore, Levine believed that individuals could be considered functionally literate even if they could not read or write. Levine made a stronger distinction than other researchers did between tasks that one may *wish* to carry out and those that one *must* carry out. Levine included the concept of information exchange, along with that of acquiring information, to underlie the importance of writing. In related discussions he noted that with reading, access to information is often emphasized; whereas with writing, through which one can make one's views and knowledge known, it is less emphasized or ignored.

Cambourne's (2001) definition of *functional literacy* was based on assumptions about society, learning, and language. It assumed that schools had the responsibility for graduating students who could read and write enough to understand and cope with basic signs, newspapers, and official forms:

> A hoped for bonus of teaching this way was that some of those graduates might be able to read well enough to enjoy literature as a socially acceptable form of escapism or pastime, or in some cases even begin to read to find out things independently. (p. 181)

Therefore, literacy and, by implication, language were seen as a kind of conduit for information to be transferred from one source, a book or a teacher, to the learner's mind. It was also seen as the medium through which the learner displays the degree to which he/she has internalized the information. Given these assumptions, it follows that the two major literacy skills required by the learner are encoding and decoding.

It was believed that once this basic form of functional literacy had been acquired, it could be applied to any domain of knowledge or concern and was a necessary prerequisite for success in later learning. Therefore, it had to be mastered by the end of the primary school so that students could enter the secondary system ready to use reading and writing knowledge well enough to learn:

> This form of literacy was most prevalent during the era of almost full employment, where the majority of the workforce could earn a living with their labor through the use of muscle power. They did not need to be highly literate to enjoy a successful working life. (Cambourne, 2001, p. 182)

It was generally believed that functional literacy as a desired outcome was an antiquated perspective. However, Cambourne recently discovered that the same assumptions of functional literacy remained inherent in the way that some teachers taught and children learned in classrooms.

Although functional literacy had a great deal of appeal because of its implied adaptability to a given cultural context, the term was inadequately defined for measurement purposes (Wagner, 1999). The use of the term *functionality*, based on the norms of a given society, failed precisely because adequate norms are so difficult to establish. Further, Wagner believed that we would be ill advised to select a universal operational definition, at either a minimum or a maximum level. As is current practice, in some countries the use of newspaper reading skills as a functional baseline may seriously underestimate literacy if the emphasis is on comprehension of a text. Such tests may also overestimate literacy if the individual, as is often the case, is asked simply to read the passage aloud, with little or no attempt at the measurement of comprehension.

Literacy for Personal Growth and Development

According to Cambourne (2001), *literacy for personal growth and development* demands more than functional literacy. It demands readers who can read the great works of literature and understand the issues, conflicts, and themes in these great works by applying them to their own lives. This kind of literacy demands writers who can write creative as well as factual texts. Several assumptions are at play within this definition. It assumes that by encouraging creativity, students may discover their true selves and that this kind of discovery is essential to personal growth and development. It also assumes that the ideal society is one in which citizens have been developed to their full potential and that every citizen has individual rights that must never be compromised. It further recognizes that those who are most successful in society have been successful because their innate potential is greater than that of those who are not so successful. "It is the kind of literacy that lies at the core of cultures that are fiercely proud of something they call independence" (p. 181).

Cambourne (2001) asserted that, if successfully achieved, literacy for personal growth and development has the potential to produce a citizenry that admires and values individual achievement and expertise. However, it also demeans and devalues a lack of expertise as a failure and tends to lay the blame for those who fail to achieve or some inadequacy on them or their culture. Cambourne stated, "It is a self-serving form of literacy that implicitly teaches students to be I-centered, to use reading and writing as a means of increasing their own self-worth, self-esteem, and for pursuing their own self serving agendas" (p. 182). Cambourne asserted that this form of literacy is often reflected in the way that writing is taught in many schools.

Literacy for Social Equity and Social Justice

Cambourne's (2001) notion of *literacy for social equity and social justice* appears commensurate with what has been termed *critical* literacy. Critical literacy has come to represent the social and cultural features that scholars insist on associating with literacy when it is viewed from the perspective of teaching and learning (Sudol & Horning, 1999). The notion of critical literacy is based on Robert Calfee's (1994) definition:

> Critical literacy includes the capacity for action, but also incorporates a broader sense of understanding and insight, and the ability to communicate with others about 'texts' whether these are written or spoken. It is the difference between understanding how to operate the lever in a voting booth versus comprehending the issues needed to decide for whom to vote and why. (p. 23)

Calfee's definition alludes to the reason that there is an essentially political dimension to the definition of critical literacy: this level of literacy provides political empowerment. Literacy education has always been necessarily political, as Freire and Macedo (1987) asserted, as well as social (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Literacy teachers choose what and how to teach; both are political and social choices. Gordon (1999) believed that critical literacy is itself an emerging concept. He attempted to show that critical literacy occurs in a variety of cultural and historical contexts. He assumed that critical literacy is a flexible concept, "fuzzy around the edges," but always having some relation to cognitive abilities and social skills.

Powell, Cantrell, and Adams (2001) recently asserted that critical literacy moves beyond holistic theory in that it confronts societal issues of power and dominance head on. A primary goal of critical pedagogy is to promote democracy by working toward a more just and equitable society. They suggested that there are three basic underlying assumptions of critical literacy. First, critical literacy assumes that the teaching of literacy is never neutral, but always embraces a particular ideology or perspective. The teaching of literacy requires that we make certain decisions about what is taught and how it is taught. It has been argued that these decisions are not neutral, but are based upon our perceptions of what constitutes literate behavior in a given societal context.

Critical theorists would argue that how we teach literacy is also problematic. Traditional instructional approaches define literacy as a series of discrete skills that can be codified and transmitted to students. Absent in such models is an acknowledgement that literacy is both a social and a cultural phenomenon. That is, it is created and used in social contexts to communicate with others—to express our ideas, to share our stories, to give us a voice. Holistic approaches to literacy instruction claim to validate the social and cultural nature of literacy by focusing on authentic uses of written language and by insisting that children read and write for real purposes.

The second assumption of critical literacy, as reported by Powell et al. (2001), was that critical literacy is consistent with a strong democratic system. Thus, critical literacy promotes democracy by challenging inequities in society as students learn how power works to promote particular interests over others. Critical literacy also helps students to unlock the hidden cultural assumptions and biases of texts. Further, a strong democracy is promoted when students are encouraged to consider all sides of an issue in the decision-making process. The knowledge of marginalized populations is given prominence in the curriculum as students read and hear about the experiences and practices of historically underrepresented groups, including issues of racism, gay perspectives, multiculturalism, and feminism. In this way critical literacy becomes 'real-world' literacy that purports to be truly functional; students are asked to read 'the world' in addition to 'reading the word' (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

The third assumption of critical literacy cited by Powell et al. (2001) states that literacy instruction can empower and lead to transformative action. Critical literacy is consciously political in that it intentionally promotes the basic tenets of democracy: freedom, justice, and equality. Students are encouraged not merely to engage in a critical reading of a text, but also to take action. This type of literacy goes beyond providing authentic purposes and audiences for reading and writing and considers the role of literacy in societal transformations. Students are learning about the power of literacy to make a difference.

Commensurate with critical literacy, Cambourne (2001) identified the third type of literacy as *literacy for social equality and social justice*. This view of literacy considers it to be inherently political in several ways. It assumes that in our society there are groups and individuals who are engaged in acquiring power and wealth at the expense of others. Language can be used to either include or exclude people from different kinds of power and rewards. A second assumption is that literacy can be equated with high degrees of control over language. This suggests that language can be used effectively to critique, challenge, and, where necessary, deny and refute the versions of truth.

However, this control over language can also be used to prevent a privileged elite from perpetuating their own agendas and thus to continually keep moving society away from privilege and elitism toward social equity and justice. It means that we must learn to be text analysts, deliberately looking for the way that language has been used. The ability to do this means understanding language at a much deeper level that we have previously been asked. It is this third kind of literacy that Cambourne (2001) asserted should underpin our current language curriculum. Cambourne's perspective on literacy appears congruent with both the purpose and aim of the Basic Literacy research study. For this study, literacy was defined by what the Basic literacy teachers were attempting to teach. This was accomplished through the classroom practices observed and discussions with Basic Literacy teachers. This information was then analyzed in light of the three definitions identified by Cambourne.

In sum, at least part of the controversy over the definition of literacy lies in how people have attempted to study literacy or implement literacy education in the first place. The methodologies chosen in literacy research usually reflect the training of the investigator or the culture of the environment. Whereas anthropologists typically use qualitative description to construct a pervasive argument, some psychologists tend to use inferential statistics to substantiate claims, and educational administrators rely on the process of staff empowerment to define success. All of these approaches have value in helping us to understand literacy. There is no easy resolution to the issue of a definition of literacy, but it is clear in the literature that a conception of literacy is required (Calfee, 1994; Cambourne, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Powell et al., 2001; Spindler, 1984), not only for a valid understanding of the term, but also for the application of literacy instruction in the classroom.

A Theoretical Framework of Literacy

Cambourne (1995) believed that if learning conditions could be identified, they would provide insights and application into promoting literacy learning in schools. One outcome of Cambourne's research was the identification of a set of conditions that seem to be present when oral language is learned. The conditions were identified as particular states of being (doing, behaving, creating); they are also a set of indispensable circumstances that co-occur and are synergistic in the sense that they both affect and are affected by each other. Together they enable language to be learned.

The first condition identified is *immersion*, which refers to the state of being saturated by, enveloped in, steeped in, or constantly bathed in that which is to be learned. From the moment of birth, young language learners are immersed in the medium that they are expected to learn. It is therefore, a necessary condition for learning to talk.

The second condition is *demonstration*. Learning begins with a demonstration of some action (Smith, 1981). Young learners receive thousands of these demonstrations. The concept of demonstrations applies to all learning; for example, to tying shoelace, riding bikes, and singing; as well as to reading, writing, and spelling.

The third condition identified is *engagement*. According to Cambourne (2001c), immersion and demonstration are necessary conditions for learning to occur, but they are not sufficient. Potential learners must first engage with the demonstration that immersion provides. Engagement incorporates a range of different behaviors. It has overtones of attention: Learning is unlikely if learners do not attend to demonstrations in which they are immersed. However, attention is unlikely if there is no perceived need or purpose for learning in the first place. Engagement also depends on active participation by the learner, which in turn involves some risk taking; learners can participate actively only if they are prepared to 'have a go.'

The fourth condition identified is *expectations*, which are essentially messages that significant others communicate to learners. They are also subtle and powerful coercers of behavior. Learners are not given any expectation that is too difficult or that they might fail; for example, learning to talk.

The fifth condition identified is *responsibility*. Circumstance determines which particular language convention or set of conventions children will attend to and subsequently internalize. Learners are left with some choice in what they will engage with next. Learners are able to exercise this choice because of the consistency of the language demonstrations occurring in the everyday ebb and flow of human discourse. The learners themselves decide the nature of the engagement that will occur.

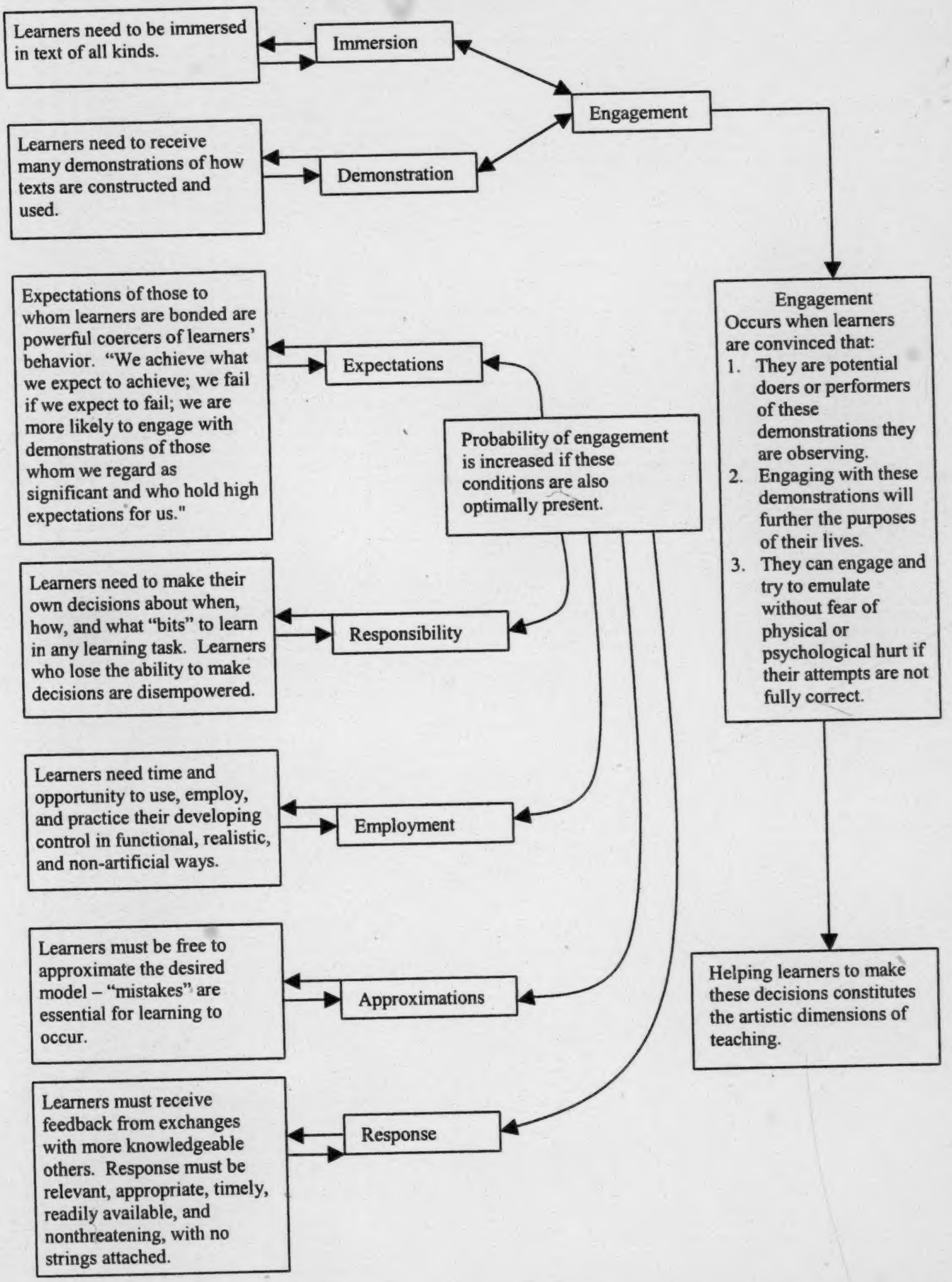
The sixth condition is *approximations*. When learning to talk, learners are not expected to wait until they have language fully under control before they are allowed to use it. There is no anxiety about unconventional forms becoming permanent fixtures in the learner's repertoire. Those who support the learner's language development expect immature forms to drop out and be replaced by conventional forms.

The seventh condition of learning identified is *employment*, which refers to the opportunities for use and practice that are provided by children's caregivers. Young learners need both time and opportunity to employ their immature, developing language skills. They seem to need two kinds of opportunity; namely, those that require social interaction with other language users and those that are done independently.

The eighth and final condition of learning is *response*, which refers to the feedback or information that learners receive from the world as a consequence of using their developing knowledge and skills. Typically, these responses are given by the significant others in the learners' life.

Initially, Cambourne (1995) explored conditions of oral language learning and applied them to literacy learning. The flow chart in Figure 1 summarizes his initial research project. The results suggest that 'engagement' is key. It does not matter how much immersion in text and language is provided; if students do not engage with literacy, no learning can occur. Cambourne was forced to look closely at the factors that affected the degree to which learners would engage with the demonstrations of literacy that were provided. As a consequence, Cambourne formulated the following "Principles of Engagement":

Figure 1. **The conditions of learning: A model of learning as it applies to literacy (Cambourne, 1995)**



Learners need to be immersed in text of all kinds.

Learners need to receive many demonstrations of how texts are constructed and used.

Expectations of those to whom learners are bonded are powerful coercers of learners' behavior. "We achieve what we expect to achieve; we fail if we expect to fail; we are more likely to engage with demonstrations of those whom we regard as significant and who hold high expectations for us."

Learners need to make their own decisions about when, how, and what "bits" to learn in any learning task. Learners who lose the ability to make decisions are disempowered.

Learners need time and opportunity to use, employ, and practice their developing control in functional, realistic, and non-artificial ways.

Learners must be free to approximate the desired model – "mistakes" are essential for learning to occur.

Learners must receive feedback from exchanges with more knowledgeable others. Response must be relevant, appropriate, timely, readily available, and nonthreatening, with no strings attached.

Probability of engagement is increased if these conditions are also optimally present.

Engagement
Occurs when learners are convinced that:

1. They are potential doers or performers of these demonstrations they are observing.
2. Engaging with these demonstrations will further the purposes of their lives.
3. They can engage and try to emulate without fear of physical or psychological hurt if their attempts are not fully correct.

Helping learners to make these decisions constitutes the artistic dimensions of teaching.

- Learners are more likely to engage deeply with demonstrations if they believe that they are capable of ultimately learning or doing whatever is being demonstrated.
- Learners are more likely to engage deeply with demonstrations if they believe that learning whatever is being demonstrated has some potential value, purpose, and use for them.
- Learners are more likely to engage with demonstrations if they are free from anxiety.
- Learners are more likely to engage with demonstrations given by someone they like, respect, admire, trust, and would like to emulate.

The flow-chart in Figure 1 represents Cambourne's (1995) early identification of learning conditions and how they apply to literacy. This research laid the foundation for Cambourne's (2001) revised literacy learning framework (Figure 2 and Figure 3), which was utilized as a theoretical framework for exploring the results of the present study.

Figure 2 illustrates what Cambourne (2001) felt occurred when he translated these conditions for literacy learning into classroom practice. As he explored the conditions of learning, it became obvious that certain processes were necessary accompaniments of the literacy learning contexts. *Transformation* is the process that enables learners to take ownership of their learning. The process of learning involves the transformation of the meanings and/or skills that someone else has demonstrated into a set of meanings and/or skills of one's own. *Discussion/reflection* is a language process that is fundamental to human learning. Both discussion and reflection have a similar purpose in learning; namely, to explore, transact, and clarify meaning. However, they differ with respect to audience. Reflection is really a discussion with oneself.

Application is inherent in the condition of 'employment.' When two or more persons collaborate in addressing or trying to resolve a problem, they are forced to interact at least with each other. This collaboration always requires discussion, and

Figure 2. **A model of classroom literacy learning.**

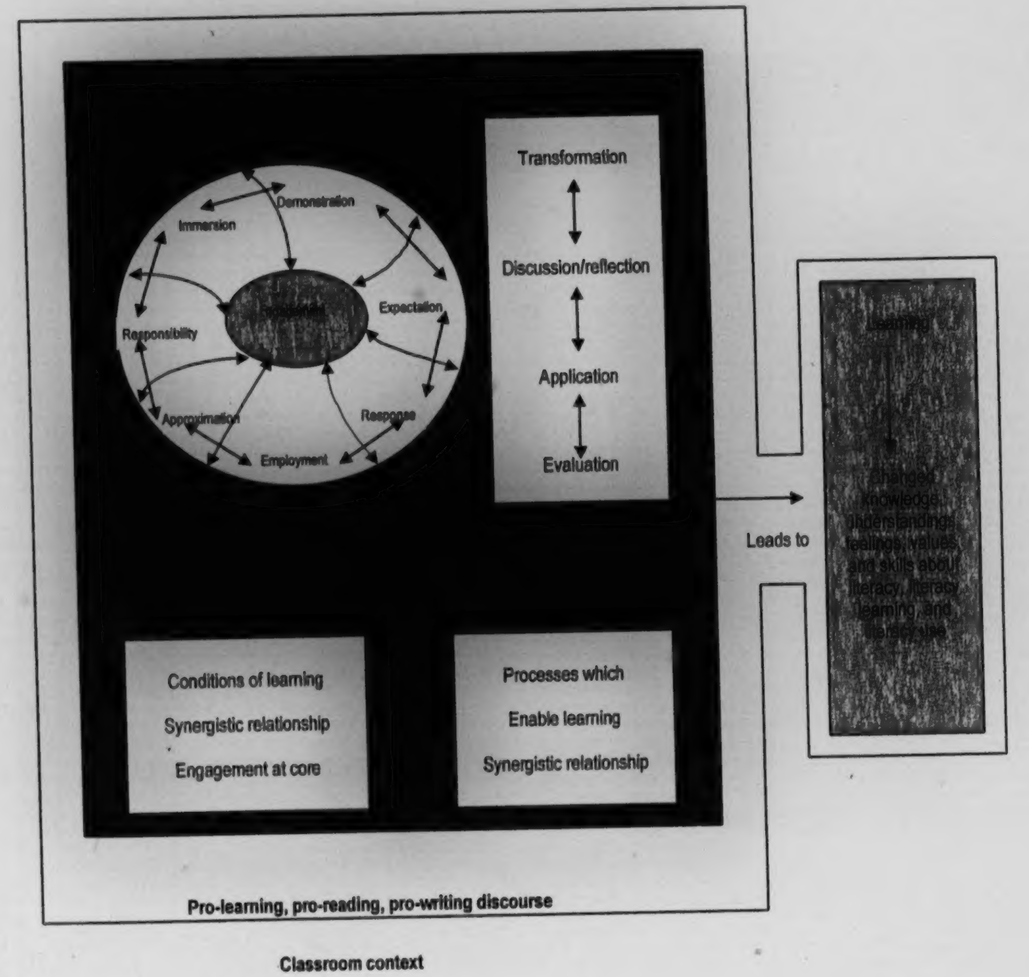

Demonstration
Immersion
Expectation
Responsibility
Approximation
Response
Employment
Transformation
Discussion/reflection
Application
Evaluation
Conditions of learning
Synergistic relationship
Engagement at core
Processes which
Enable learning
Synergistic relationship
Leads to
Learning
Changed knowledge, understandings, feelings, values, and skills about literacy, literacy learning, and literacy use
Pro-learning, pro-reading, pro-writing discourse
Classroom context

Figure 3. **A framework for turning learning into classroom reading instruction.**

Condition	What we think this condition means	Some possible classroom strategies that we can employ to implement this condition
Immersion	Providing multiple opportunities for students to experience (a) visual saturation of print and text and (b) aural saturation of sounds of written texts.	Make functional use of wall print through regular "print walks"; sustained silent reading (SSR); teacher read-alouds; shared reading (SR); taped books; choral reading (e.g., poems, rhymes, songs, jingles) on wall print.
Demonstration	Doing lots of teacher modeling of the processes of reading, with special emphasis on making explicit the invisible processes that make reading possible. Collecting, displaying, and discussing models (examples) of different kinds of texts.	Do teacher read-alouds and SR accompanied by think-alouds. Use joint construction of texts accompanied by think-alouds. Focus on processes, knowledge, and understanding that make effective reading, spelling, and writing possible.
Engagement	Continually communicating and modeling a set of reasons for becoming powerful, critical readers. These reasons must be relevant to the pupils we teach.	"Propagandize" the value of reading through constant messages, explicit reasons, personal stories, "nagging," posters, models, and demonstrations of power and value of reading.
Expectations	Communicating, through language and behavior, the message that every pupil is capable of learning to read, and that you expect every child to become a reader.	Use flexible, mixed-ability groups that continually change and avoid communicating subtle negative expectations through ability grouping, odious comparisons, and "put-down" language. Make explicit the processes, knowledge, and understanding that effective readers use. Constantly remind students that they all learned to talk-a much harder task.
Responsibility	Encouraging pupils, and giving them opportunities, to make some, not all, decisions about what and how they learn. Making explicit the idea that good learners know how to make learning decisions. Modeling and demonstrating examples of "taking responsibility" or "ownership" of learning.	Devise activities that don't have simple right-wrong answers. Insist that comments and judgments be justified wherever possible. Set up support structures, processes that allow pupils to take responsibility for learning. Use language that invites open-ended responses and reflection (e.g., "What else could you do when you're reading and you come to something you don't understand? Why would you do that?")
Approximation	Communicating through discourse, (i.e., language and behavior) such messages as these: Having a go (i.e., making an attempt and not getting it perfect at first) is fundamental to learning. Mistakes are our friends in that they help us adjust and refine our knowledge, understandings, and skills so that next time we do better. Ultimately our approximations must become conventional (expectations).	Share stories of how we learn to do things outside of school – like learning to talk, skate, or play tennis. Highlight the role that approximations and responses play. Model and demonstrate good/bad miscues as approximations that help/hinder the reader. Discuss spelling approximations as temporary spellings (not invented) and study similarities/differences to conventional spelling. Model/demonstrate how effective readers deal with approximations.
Use	Providing multiple opportunities for learner-readers to apply their developing skills and understandings about reading and the reading process in authentic and meaningful ways.	Provide lots of structures, opportunities for students to engage in acts of reading for specific purposes, problems and events. Try SSR and DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). Use reading for a range of purposes, do lots of meaningful and authentic writing, and develop a poll of authentic reading/writing activities and tasks that can be constantly reused without boring the students (e.g., read and retell text types).
Response	Paying close attention to learners' approximations and recycling demonstrations and models that contain information; knowledge they've not yet got under control. Drawing explicit attention to salient features of demonstrations/models that will help learners modify approximations.	Set up structures/processes that make it possible for learners to receive feedback (responses) from multiple sources, e.g., other students as well as the teacher. Constantly model how effective readers use various cues available to create/understand meaning.

transformation occurs as a consequence of the discussion that typically accompanies construction, understanding new knowledge, or mastering new skills. A continuous thread that runs through any teaching/learning process is *evaluation*. When engaged, learners are constantly evaluating their own performance as they discuss, transform, and apply what is to be learned. It is common practice to observe teachers continually responding to learners and providing answers to the 'how am I doing?' question.

Cambourne (2001a) recently provided an expanded version of his theory of learning into a framework for classroom reading instruction, as identified in Figure 3. This resulted from a complex social process involving a community of learners jointly constructing knowledge through the use of language. The final outcome was the set of general applications (center column) and the set of aligned teacher behaviors (right-hand column). These demonstrate how a theory of literacy learning can be applied in a practical manner.

Cambourne's (2001b) research demonstrated that explicit and systematic reading instruction was not enough unless there were also high degrees of what was termed "mindful and contextualized" teaching. Complex learning like learning to read could occur only if a certain kind of learning community or culture was deliberately and purposefully created by the teacher. That is, learner-readers should be acculturated into a community of readers and writers. Such learning cultures are the result of careful decisions regarding resources, personal relationships, and organizational routines and programs.

According to Cambourne (2001), Figure 3 represents the product of some very complex learning by teachers. Teachers as learners need the authentic opportunity to construct meaning and knowledge individually and collaboratively. For this to occur, both time and opportunity are needed. Turbill's (1994) work appeared to strongly support Cambourne's conclusion that most groups of teachers need the opportunity to engage in learning. Like the students they teach, teachers also benefit from being in learning settings that go beyond mere transmission of 'how to' knowledge.

Cambourne's (2001) framework of classroom reading instruction was employed to assist with understanding throughout the Basic Literacy data collection and analysis. Cambourne's work was deemed well suited to the Basic Literacy study because it presented literacy in light of elementary classroom instruction rather than adult literacy, which was often cited in the literacy literature. Regardless of definition and theoretical framework, literacy education issues are often centered on the differences between successful and struggling readers. Specifically, why do some children acquire literacy skills easily, at an early age, whereas others, even with assistance, labor over basic literacy skills throughout life?

Literacy Acquisition

Literacy acquisition involves learning how language is encoded in a writing system and learning the orthographic rules that relate graphic units to linguistic units. In learning to read, the child must learn to decode oral language forms from written forms. In learning to spell, the learning task is to encode linguistic forms into written forms. Acquisition of literacy, however, is not a natural developmental process, and specific home, cultural, and schooling conditions are required. But even when these conditions are optimal, some children still have serious and sometimes unexpected problems in attaining fluent literacy.

Literacy problems have been associated with the cognitive capacity of learners. Many researchers have focused on the interaction between reading comprehension and phonological skills (Bryant, MacLean, Bradley, & Crossland, 1990; Holligan & Johnston, 1991). There is now convincing evidence that phonological skills, such as rhyming and analysis of words into syllables, can develop in the absence of literacy instruction.

However, the analysis of words into smaller phonetic segments appears to require the experience of (alphabetic) reading instruction (Reitsma & Verhoeven, 1998).

Calfee and Curley (1995) discovered that cognitive competencies underlying language are similar across individuals and cultures. These cognitive competencies include the availability of unlimited long-term memory capacity, a limited short-term memory, and the critical importance of organization and information retrieval. Stanovich (1986, 1991) further detailed the cognitive processes that appear to have the greatest impact on learning disabilities. Central to children's reading difficulties are deficits in phonological processing. These readers have difficulty making explicit reports about sound segments at the phoneme level; they display naming difficulties, their utilization of phonological codes in short-term memory is inefficient, and their categorical perception of certain phonemes may not be normal. This difficulty appears to be a causal one; that is, children who have trouble with phonological processing subsequently have difficulty learning letter-to-sound correspondence. Ultimately, this seems to affect the child's ability to gain reading speed and fluency.

Baddeley, Gathercole and Papagno (1998) conducted seminal work within the realm of cognitive processing. Initially, in 1986, Baddeley postulated that working memory was actually a theoretical account of the phonological loop, which not only recalls but also rehearses new information. Baddeley et al. (1998) recently provided a thorough account of the phonological loop as a language-learning device. These researchers suggested that the phonological loop functions not only to remember new words, but also to help learn new words, whereby new words are encountered and incorporated into existing phonological patterns. Previous work in short-term memory focused on digit recall, whereas Baddeley and his colleagues began to consider nonword repetition for new insights. Their findings suggest that if the loop is considered important for acquiring new vocabulary, then several distinct variables could have a known impact on the phonological loop. These include the word length effect, the phonological similarity effect, and the articulatory suppression effect. Word length and articulatory suppression are found in the rehearsal process, whereas the source of the phonological similarity is believed to be in long-term memory.

Gernsbacher (1993) reported that less skilled readers have less efficient suppression mechanisms. This study concluded that less skilled readers could initially activate information as efficiently as more skilled readers; indeed, they activate contextually appropriate information more strongly than do more skilled readers. What plagues less skilled readers is their inefficiency in dampening the activation of irrelevant or inappropriate information. Based on a cognitive processing model, it appears that these types of students are unable to focus on the appropriate cues.

The study of literacy acquisition appears to be heavily biased in favor of research undertaken in the industrialized world. Much of this research might be better termed *the acquisition of reading and writing skills*, with a heavy emphasis on the relationship between cognitive skills (i.e., perception and memory) and reading skills (i.e., decoding, comprehension, and critical thinking). This literature advised that reading remediation programs should strongly emphasize cognitive strategies to assist with improving reading achievement. However, it is acknowledged that there still remains a significant gap in our understandings of the relationship between the acquisition of reading and cognitive skills.

Predictors of Literacy Achievement

An increased understanding of cognitive processing allows predictions and assumptions about what impacts reading achievement to be asserted. Perfetti (1995) claimed that there has been enough quality research to inform reading education on basic issues. Four solid results of cognitive research should be considered, including that (a) skilled readers read words rather than skip them, (b) less skilled readers do rely on context, (c) skilled readers use phonology in reading, and (d) children learn to read successfully by learning how their writing system works. Although these skills and cognitive processes are intrinsic to the child, there is an interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic variables that can have a particularly devastating effect on the acquisition of reading skills. Stanovich (1993) has referred to this as the 'Matthew' effect. He noted that children who begin school with poor phonological awareness have difficulty learning the alphabetic principle. This in turn hinders their ability to recognize words. Word identification becomes a laborious process, which impedes reading comprehension. Reading without comprehension is unrewarding; thus children tend to avoid reading, which in turn means that they fail to acquire the necessary practice in order for reading to become automatic, fluid, and enjoyable. This sets in motion a negative spiral with emotional ramifications, as would be expected when a child encounters failure on a task considered central to the school experience.

Often the ramifications of the 'Mathew' effect are not realized until the student has been in an educational system for one or two years. Many educational professionals are hesitant to diagnosis a reading delay at an early age. However, De Jong and Van Der Leij (1998) suggested that considerable amounts of research have been devoted to the search for early and specific predictors of reading achievement (i.e., word decoding and reading comprehension). As previously mentioned, phonological abilities are believed to be a major determinant of the development of word decoding and are generally found to be better predictors than measures of vocabulary. On the other hand, vocabulary seems to be a major determinant of reading comprehension.

As in most of the studies reviewed, De Jong and Van Der Leij (1998) noted that the correlation of nonverbal IQ with word decoding is equal to, or larger than, its correlation with vocabulary. Therefore, in addition to verbal abilities, nonverbal abilities should also be incorporated in a longitudinal study on the specific predictors of word decoding. Nonverbal abilities have been assumed to underlie reading comprehension in the early phases of learning to read. De Jong and Van Der Leij further asserted that general abilities in kindergarten best predict the differences in early reading acquisition and that the general ("g") factor was the most important predictor of both word decoding and reading comprehension at the end of Grade 1. These findings appear to suggest that more attention to the nonverbal abilities of students is required. Recently, Gardner (1999) suggested that more important than the general factor is attention to multiple intelligences. This could have significant implications for the reading remediation of students such as those in the Basic Literacy program who continue to struggle with reading at an older age. Gardner concluded that the teaching of reading skills must be approached through a variety of intelligences.

Rayner and Pollatsck (1989) discussed the distribution of poor readers in terms of their measured levels of intelligence. Because the correlation between reading scores and IQ scores is generally high, a large percentage of readers (one to two years behind) are accounted for in terms of low intelligence. Of interest are those students whose IQ scores are such that they should be better readers than they are. It appears that poor readers with higher than expected IQs tend to do less well than good readers with comparable IQs on tasks requiring the ability to decode phonetic information, suggesting that their problems may be largely attributable to decoding deficiencies.

What might the pattern of association between measures of intellectual ability and reading achievement tell us about the nature of reading and, by extension, language literacy? One possibility is that formal language draws on a wide range of relatively fixed thinking, reasoning, and information-processing skills. The abilities that underlie intellectual achievements in a variety of domains support the development of formal language as well. The lower a child's measured intelligence, "the more likely he or she is to lack a wide range of skills necessary to become a proficient reader" (Rayner & Pollatsck, 1989, p. 114). Cronbach (1990) noted that intelligence is not a thing; it is a style of work.

The prediction of reading problems shows a positive correlational relationship between variables such as IQ, ethnicity, parent education, socioeconomic status, age, gender, and reading (Carver, 2000). These variables are often fixed in the sense that the individual cannot control them; nor do they usually fluctuate greatly during a person's life. However, there are many fluid variables associated with literacy, including classroom instruction, class size, and school culture. Educators take pride in continually challenging themselves to improve educational practices, all in the name of student achievement. This often becomes the impetus for school board initiatives and remediation programs. However, educational initiatives and remediation programs must be examined to determine if they enhance the reading performance of students.

Literacy Program Interventions

Generally speaking, it is thought that effective compensatory programs place students in a literature-rich environment that is contextually relevant for the student. In this environment, teachers engage students in meaningful and extended dialogue about relevant topics, and this dialogue is related to the students' reading and writing. Contextually relevant instruction integrates the student's remedial program with the general instruction program (Meredith & Steele, 1985). Although most educators would agree with this in theory, this type of instruction is open to teacher interpretation, and it is difficult to measure achievable outcomes.

One characteristic within most literacy settings is the utilization of a compensatory reading program. A number of compensatory reading programs have been identified that purport to be research based and successfully remediate reading failure (Pikulski, 1994; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). Reading Recovery is an early intervention program that originated in New Zealand with Marie Clay. It has received international attention. The Reading Recovery model is a one-on-one early intervention program that does not follow a predetermined curriculum. Rather, Reading Recovery teachers work within a defined instructional framework as they make instructional decisions that focus on the reading frustrations experienced by individual children.

The Reading Recovery intervention program features explicit instruction in both skills and strategies within the context of reading and writing. A trained Reading Recovery teacher plans and implements a 30-minute lesson that is tailored to meet the struggles of at-risk readers. Reading Recovery lessons follow a basic framework: (a) rereading of easy familiar books; (b) independent reading of a familiar instructional-level text; (c) letter identification or making and breaking words; (d) composing, writing, and cutting up sentences; and (e) introducing and reading a new book. The books utilized in these lessons are leveled from highly predictable to more complex sentence structures.

Strong claims regarding the success of Reading Recovery have been reported by the creator of the program (Clay, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1987). Overall, the research on Reading Recovery claimed that it is effective with almost 75% of the students who participated (who are themselves in the bottom 20% of their class), with the effects of the program appearing to be durable over time. Independent evaluations have attested to significant reading gains for children participating in Reading Recovery programs (Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred, & McNaught, 1995; Shanahan & Barr, 1995; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). However, Reading Recovery has not been equally effective with all children (Center et al., 1995). Despite the claims of success and worldwide implementation, numerous criticisms regarding the Reading Recovery program have come to the forefront (Chapman & Tunmer, 1991; Hicks & Villaume, 2001).

Upon examination, it was discovered that children in Clay's research were not randomly assigned to experimental and control groups and that the validity of the results was questionable due to this error in the initial selection of the children. Further, the initial selection of children was based on criteria that identified only those children who were likely to succeed and excluded those children who were not. An American study of the Reading Recovery program discovered concerns over the multiple univariate analysis, because it is well known to produce false positives (Nicholson, 1989). Independent evaluations completed in New Zealand asserted that the net reading gain, which is attributable to Reading Recovery, actually appears to be quite modest one year after the program has been terminated (Glynn, Crooks, Bethune, Ballard, & Smith; 1989). Chapman and Tunmer (1991) have further argued that the decline in reading achievement following discontinuation of Reading Recovery is likely to be the lack of systematic attention to basic metalinguistic and phonological recoding skills.

Hicks and Villaume (2001) recently conducted a study on the literacy development of two Reading Recovery children. They discovered that the benefits of Reading Recovery are different for each individual. One child required no further intervention, but the other child did not make the reading gains required to be at an average reading level. They asserted that a program such as Reading Recovery preserves existing beliefs and limits the potential for providing effective instruction. Hicks and Villaume concluded that Reading Recovery should exist in a climate of experimentation in which educators continually consider variations that could enhance learning or efficiency.

Despite these well-documented evaluations and concerns, Reading Recovery remained popular. Within site-based school districts, such as the urban school district that established the Basic Literacy program, many schools implemented Reading Recovery programs. However, after expending resources into the program for two or more years, difficulties emerged. These concerned the cost of individual teacher training, one-to-one instruction, budget restraints, and limited academic gains.

Unlike Reading Recovery, Success for All is a comprehensive program for restructuring primary schools where students are ‘at risk’ of not developing functional literacy by seven years of age. The program was first developed in the United States but has since been applied in other countries. Designed by Robert Slavin (1993), Success for All is based on two essential principles: prevention and immediate, intensive intervention. During a 90-minute reading period, students who are performing at similar reading levels are grouped into the same class irrespective of age. The program emphasizes the development of basic language skills and sound and letter recognition skills with sound blending and phonics. One of the most important elements of the Success for All models is the use of one-to-one tutoring to support students' success in reading. Initial research conducted where the program had been in place for four years provided strong support for the program (Slavin, 1993).

Hopkins, Youngman, Harris, and Wordsworth (1999) conducted a more recent evaluation of the initial effects and implementation of the Success for All pilot in Britain. They noted that Success for All is a worthy piece of educational reform that could assist with the eradication of reading failure for all children by the age of nine. Hopkins et al. asserted that much of the power of Success for All as a curriculum and instructional program comes from the attention that is paid to implementation. The fact that the quality of implementation of the program is regularly monitored is a major factor in its positive impact on student reading levels. When data on the quality of implementation were compared with average reading levels within each school, a clear pattern emerged. The higher the quality of implementation, the more rapid was the progress being made by the students.

At the onset of the Success for All pilots, there were a number of difficulties that had an impact upon the quality of implementation. These initial difficulties included short lead time and teachers' initial impression of the component materials. However, the final evaluation of the program identified that as the program became more established, implementation issues tended to move away from the practical to the pedagogical. The issue of establishing consistency among teacher practices and ensuring that the program was delivered in the correct sequence occupied much of the facilitator's time. The study confirmed that where schools were running the program as intended, results were being made, but in those schools where this was not the case, the results were not as positive.

Au and Carroll (1997) examined the KEEP Demonstration Classroom Project that was designed to determine whether full implementation of a social constructivist approach to literacy could improve the achievement of native Hawaiian students. This constructivist approach to literacy was developed at the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP). The KEEP curriculum identified six aspects of literacy: (a) ownership of reading and writing, (b) reading comprehension, (c) the writing process, (d) language and vocabulary knowledge, (e) word-reading strategies and spelling, and (f) voluntary reading. Ownership of literacy was the overall goal, and the curriculum emphasized reading and writing.

Over two years the Demonstration Classroom Project produced positive results. Although the whole-literacy curriculum was demanding to execute, classroom implementation data demonstrated that a high number of items were in place by the end of the two years. Au and Carroll (1997) discovered that classroom organization items were most readily implemented, followed by items related to student opportunities. It was not surprising to the researchers that instructional practices were more challenging to implement, with assessment items proving to be the most difficult. Regardless, with the change to the Demonstration Classroom Project, there was a marked difference in student achievement. Prior to the start of the project, 60% of the students were below grade level in the writing process, and only 40% were at the grade level. After only one year in the project, the first group of teachers were able to reverse the student achievement for the writing process: 68% of students were now above or at grade level, and only 32% were below.

Most reading intervention programs focus on younger at-risk students, but there has been relatively little research on reading remediation for children between the ages of 9 and 14. Lingard (1997) promoted *literacy acceleration* as a strategy for low-attaining secondary-age students in Britain. Literacy Acceleration was a response to the need to develop a clear, practical, and effective strategy for improving the reading and writing abilities of low-achieving students. The English curriculum of small remedial groups was strongly and convincingly criticized (Ainscow, 1985; Smith, 1988), and it was suggested that students should have access to the normal curriculum via systems of in-class support (Gulliford, 1987). However, Lingard asserted that there still appeared to be no evidence that integrating low achievers in literacy into mixed-ability classes was effective. Indeed, establishing how children who have experienced many years of educational failure can become enabled to make substantial progress with reading and writing is one of the most important problems facing education today.

As a basis for Literacy Acceleration, the following key elements were identified as essential:

1. Teachers need to be fully committed to the belief that the students are capable of making substantial learning gains.
2. Teacher support should give each student a strong feeling of success and should significantly enhance his/her self-esteem.
3. Literacy Acceleration should consist of meaningful reading and writing activities.
4. Each student should read to an adult every day.
5. Systematic phonological teaching and spelling should be provided.
6. Regular individual help should be given with written composition.

It was clear that if the key elements were to take priority, the students would have to be brought together into small groups, and the curriculum could be geared specifically to their needs. Literacy Acceleration did not employ new strategies but rather combined existing strategies in a new way to provide intensive, daily, individual support.

The results of this literacy program looked very encouraging. It was cited that T-tests carried out over a two-year period on the standardized reading and spelling scores confirmed that the learning gains were statistically significant. Lingard (1997) asserted that most low attainers in literacy do not fail to learn to read and write because of ‘inadequate’ intelligence. Rather, poor literacy is often the result of deficiencies in the literacy support provided by schools. Success depends on the expectations of teachers and the type of literacy teaching within the school.

Students in the middle-school years face increasingly complex literacy challenges as they move from a curriculum where acquiring initial literacy knowledge and competencies permeates their school day, to a time when their literacy skills and interests are prerequisites for success across the school curriculum (Hosking & Teberg, 1998). Hynds (1997), in a three-year ethnographic study, focused on the literacy development of nine adolescents in their middle-school language arts classroom. The study concluded that "rather than mastering a set of discrete, decontextualized skills, students engaged in a complex array of social practices that defined and developed their identities as readers, writers, and language users" (p. 12). This suggests that 'control' over language is essential to student success and that, in turn, schools should be promoting a form of critical literacy.

Strauss and Irvin (2000) identified exemplary literacy learning programs for adolescents. They asserted that literacy programs in academically effective middle-grade schools emphasize literacy learning across the curriculum; reading and writing are not relegated to the language arts class, but are taught and encouraged in content areas. Classes should be scheduled and designed to meet the needs of struggling readers. Facilities should also include trained reading professionals, with evidence that literacy is valued by interesting and accessible materials, instructional methods, beliefs about literacy learning, school organization, and school culture. Davidson and Koppenhaver (1993) described successful literacy programs as being both good literacy programs and adolescent programs. The needs of the individual students should drive the school schedule, curriculum, and instruction; students are treated with respect and are rewarded and recognized for their achievements.

In summary, several compensatory reading intervention programs (Reading Recovery, Success for All, Literacy Acceleration, and the KEEP project) have attempted to improve literacy competence. However, longitudinal studies demonstrate that positive short-term effects of such programs are not always maintained over time (Chapman & Tunmer, 1991; Glynn et al., 1989; Hicks & Villaume, 2001; Hopkins et al., 1999). Often ignored in discussions of programs for students at risk is the fact that many programs and practices typical of general education have important consequences for students who are at risk of school failure. Most innovations in classroom practices or school organizations claim to have positive effects on average and high achieving students. Therefore, it is often commonly and naïvely assumed that if certain instructional methods and organizational structures are seen to have had important positive effects on general achievement, then these methods should be effective for at-risk students. However, given the unique nature of reading difficulties and the complexity of the reading process, it is not surprising that no single program or approach has proven effective for all children.

Literacy and Motivation

Verhoeven and Snow (2001) claimed that there exists a social and affective context of literacy development. They believed that the traditional characterization of literacy as cognitive rather than affective, and as solitary rather than a social act, is misguided. Promoting literacy acquisition requires interventions that address attitudes and beliefs as much as interventions that assure cognitive changes in the learners. As previously noted, references to engagement are evident throughout the literacy literature and are central to Cambourne's theory of literacy learning. Motivation can be seen as an active process in which children construct ideas about language and literacy as they communicate. Learners are engaged in selecting activities, in attending to specific parts of these activities, and in applying strategies for problem solving. Guthrie and Knowles (2001) asserted that while they are engaged in conversations or in reading texts, learners continuously make predictions, monitor the outcome of these predictions, and seek a solution to problems they encounter. Therefore literacy can be seen as an instrument to foster children's thinking and concept development.

According to Verhoeven and Snow (2001), engaging in enough practice to ensure reading fluency presupposes that a number of factors are in place. Children approach reading instruction understanding the uses, purposes, and value of literacy. This expectation typically reflects having been exposed to adult literacy practices during the preschool years. Children approach reading instruction enthusiastic about learning to read. This expectation often reflects having had positive affective experiences with reading in the preschool years. Children approach reading instruction expecting to succeed. This expectation is based on the assumption that children who enter formal instructional contexts are already able to recognize a few words. Children have access to reading materials of a level that they can read successfully and that they want to read. Verhoeven and Snow further asserted that skilled reading and reading development must incorporate a central place for engagement in literacy practice, a factor that is likely only if joy is part of the experience.

Barton (2001) asserted that literacy, thinking, and motivation cannot be easily separated. Through literacy, children are able to construct meaning, to share ideas, to test them, and to articulate questions. A high level of literacy helps children to collaborate with others in learning new concepts. Children can be taught to draw inferences from their personal knowledge and to actively link their knowledge schemata to new ideas that are introduced in a text or in a lesson. The task for the teacher is to engage children by introducing concepts that can modify and expand students' existing knowledge schemes. Ideally, students should learn to use new knowledge as a basis for developing higher level skill in comprehension and thinking. Effective teachers help children select relevant study topics, model their own way of using comprehension strategies, and prompt students to make inferences from the text.

A reciprocal relationship between motivational variables and the development of literacy and thinking can be established. Engagement, intrinsic motivation, personal interest, and other motivational factors enhance learning and are also affected by it (Alexander, 1998; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Engaged readers activate prior knowledge to construct new understandings and use cognitive strategies to regulate comprehension in order to satisfy personal interests. Motivations to read range widely, including interest in specific topics, aesthetic goals, escape, solving specific problems, and academic purposes. Engaged readers often participate in social contexts to complete a task, to gain knowledge, to interpret an author's perspective, or to escape into the world of literature, approaching these literate activities as those than can be carried out with social support and mediation (Baker, Afflerbach, & Reinking, 1996).

The notion of literacy engagement is closely linked to views of children as having an active role in their own development. The child as a novice is continually attempting to make sense of new situations and to acquire the skills necessary to function in those situations. The teacher's role is to help the child by arranging tasks and activities in such a way that they are more easily accessible. Intersubjectivity, shared understanding based on a common focus of attention, is seen by adherents of literacy engagement as a crucial prerequisite for successful communication between teacher and child. This suggests that teachers in the Basic Literacy classroom had the task of creating settings in which children's engagement is maintained.

Classroom Literacy Instruction

Five years ago Hoing (2001) raised controversy and confusion in the literacy field on how best to teach children to read. Specifically, the question was, should skills be taught directly in an organized and explicit skills development program as part of beginning-to-read instruction, or will students acquire these skills more indirectly by being read to, immersed in print, and by learning them in the context of reading for meaning? Research by leading experts in the field of literacy has shown that it is not an either/or question.

The most effective reading instruction uses a balanced and comprehensive approach that includes the explicit, systematic teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics as well as an abundance of rich and varied literature and writing practice (Adams, 1990; Adams & Bruck, 1995; Beck & Juel, 1995; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996; Share & Stanovich, 1995; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). It is now conventional wisdom that only through direct skill instruction can all children learn to automatically recognize a growing number of words and possess the necessary tools to decipher new words they encounter.

More than 30 years ago Jeanne Chall exhaustively reviewed the research on beginning reading programs in her classic 1967 study, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*. She concluded that beginning reading programs that emphasized decoding or phonics, the direct and systematic focus on the system that maps print to speech, and the opportunity to practice learning that system in the context of reading were much more effective than those that solely used meaning-based approaches. This is because thoroughly decoding a word builds the sound/pattern and meaning connections that enable readers to automatically recognize the word on subsequent readings.

In two recent surveys of reading professionals, ‘balance’ was declared one of the hottest topics in reading education (Cassidy & Cassidy, 1999; Cassidy & Wenrich, 1998). The reasons for the current popularity of balance are not immediately evident. Perhaps ‘balanced’ instruction seems stable, reasonable, sensible, or moderate. However, it is clear that many teachers are now implementing so-called balanced approaches. Fitzgerald (1999) suggested that there is no single, right balanced approach to teaching reading. Rather, balance is a philosophical perspective about what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how those kinds of knowledge can be attained.

In a balanced reading perspective, researchers tend to see three broad categories of children's knowledge about reading as equally important: local knowledge about reading, global knowledge about reading, and love of reading or affective knowledge about reading. Local knowledge about reading includes areas such as phonological awareness, a sight word repertoire, knowledge of sound symbol relationships, and knowledge of some basic orthographic patterns. Global knowledge includes areas such as understanding, interpretation, and response to reading; and strategies for enabling understanding, interpretation, and response to reading. Love of reading includes feelings, positive attitude, motivation, and the desire to read. It is important to note that these multiple kinds of knowledge are not entirely separate or discrete domains. Rather, in a complete view of the reading process, these are interconnected in many ways.

A teacher who holds a balanced philosophical perspective of reading is likely to use at least three general principles to design a classroom reading program. The first principle has to do with the curricular goals of the reading program. The goals drive everything else that follows. A second principle of balance is that instructional methods sometimes considered to be opposites or contrasts are used so that the positive features of each, especially those features not present in the other way of teaching, can permit the fullest array of possible learning to occur. A third principle of balance deals with the kinds of reading materials that would be used in the classroom.

Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) asserted that although we have learned a great deal about literacy and literacy instruction over the past decades, there remains significant controversy over literacy education. In their estimation, each teacher is ultimately in the best position to bring principles into practice in a meaningful way for his/her particular community of learners; the notion of principled instruction is particularly supportive of teacher empowerment and professionalization.

Further, Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) claimed that as literacy educators, it is critical that we avoid labels and acknowledge our common ground. One common challenge that we face is that as we increase our understanding of literacy and instruction, our conception of best practices broadens and deepens, and we are less able to offer simple, narrow solutions. As suggested by Strickland (1994/1995), students need and deserve instruction that is well informed and based on a rich model of the reading process. Her vision of best practices embraces the richness and complexity of literacy and instruction:

> A literacy curriculum that emphasizes what is basic values and builds on the knowledge that students bring to school, emphasizes the construction of meaning through activities that require higher order thinking, and offers extensive opportunities for learners to apply literacy strategies and their underlying skills in the context of meaningful tasks. (pp. 296-297)

According to Perfetti (1995), the results of literacy research should lead to general goals of reading education/classroom implementation that can be met in a wide variety of ways rather than a particular method of teaching. These are important thoughts when considering how individual teachers approach each of their literacy classrooms. For example, research has suggested that an emphasis on context by some teachers might be misplaced. Children learn to use context readily, even when they are not good at reading. Nicholson (1991) reevaluated Goodman's (1965) classic study and suggested that an emphasis on context had not solved prevalent reading problems. By replicating Goodman's original study, Nicholson suggested that Goodman might have exaggerated the effects of context.

A large body of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pressley, El-Dinary, Brown, & Schuder, 1995) has investigated the efficacy of specific reading strategies for students struggling with literacy. Success appeared most frequently when

- students were taught to use a small repertoire of strategies;
- there was extensive, direct explanation and modeling of strategies;
- there was extensive student practice of strategies with teacher guidance and feedback in response to student needs;

- strategies in teaching and student applications occurred across the curriculum;
- flexibility in strategy use was emphasized; and
- teachers provided extensive commentary to students.

The balanced approach to reading instruction appears to combine many strategies into one approach. It constitutes what Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) would consider common ground.

Organizational Context of the Basic Literacy Program

The implementation of educational theories in school districts and classrooms can at times be controversial and misguided. As noted by Falk-Ross (2002), the importance of who is responsible for creating and facilitating a student's success cannot be underestimated. The underlying principles of an organization can profoundly impact where the locus of responsibility lies and subsequently the implementation of remedial interventions such as the Basic Literacy program. For the previous two decades, the large urban school district in which this study was conducted had based its operations on the trend of site-based management in education.

One of the major trends of the educational reform movement has been the push to decentralize decision making, allowing those closest to the teaching and learning process—principals, teachers, and parents—to be both more independent and more responsible for results. Over the years, site-based management has evolved from a stand-alone reform to one that typically is embedded within a comprehensive approach to improving student achievement and school performances. Rather than being viewed as an end in itself, the creation of greater responsibility and flexibility at the school level has come to be seen as crucial to the successful implementation of standards, teaching-quality initiatives, and other key reforms.

The concept of site-based management is derived from corporate management theories such as Deming's (1986, 1994) philosophy of management (commonly referred to as Total Quality Management). It also has been influenced by the high-involvement management approach, which finds that employees perform best in an environment where they are "deeply involved in the ongoing improvement of the organization and are committed to its success" (Drury, 1999, p. 3). Site-based managed schools and districts are hoping to mirror the positive results that such participatory decision-making techniques have yielded for corporations during the past 30 years.

The effects of decentralization on student achievement still remain relatively unknown. Factors such as stakeholder resistance, institutional barriers, lack of focus on student achievement, limited school authority, concentration of authority vested in administrators, and deficiencies in resources have limited the impact of site-based management on educational outcomes (Drury, 1999). More than any other limitation, stakeholder resistance may affect the success or failure of site-based management attempts. A significant portion of recent research may be best summed up by Wyman's (2000) study which suggested that, at its best, site-based decision making is the grand experiment of letting local schools determine how to meet the district's educational goals and objectives.

Dellar (1998) examined the relationship between organizational climate and the school's capacity to implement and sustain authentic site-based management. Essentially, whether the climate is negative or positive, tailored strategies for improving decision making might be undertaken prior to embarking on improvement initiatives. The climate within the school district in which this research took place is one of general enthusiasm for site-based decision making; however, no prerequisites exist for administrative skill levels in this realm. Dempster (2000) conducted a site-based study and concluded that the positives are perceived by principals to outweigh the negatives that occur at individual schools. However, was this the perception when embarking on improvement initiatives at the broader district level?

Webster (1995) noted that in order to meet accountability requirements, which are essential at the district level, principals must become competent in measurement and the design of practical evaluations. The competencies that principals must demonstrate in assessment and accountability under site-based management are divided into four areas: (a) basic measurement concepts, such as reliability, validity, test types, and performance assessment; (b) knowledge about the use of test data to improve instruction, including test-taking skills and the purposes of testing; (c) basic evaluation concepts; and (d) the characteristics of a good testing program and criteria for judging assessment quality. This suggests that principals in site-based organizations would benefit from graduate studies that investigate evaluation and research design.

If school districts are attempting to improve student achievement, they must also consider the impact of site-based decision making on the efforts of classroom teachers. Several researchers (Joyce, Calhoun, & Hopkins, 1999; Oswald, 1995; Peterson, 1991) concluded overall that site-based management has not contributed to consistent or stable improvements in student performance. The reasons for sited-base management's insignificant impact are attributed to piecemeal implementation, neglect of classroom instruction and curriculum, and lack of teacher authority, decision-making skills, communication, and trust among stakeholders.

In sum, the claims of supporters of the movement towards decision making at the school level generally fall into one or more of three categories: administrative efficacy, educational effectiveness, and participant influence. Critics have identified a number of problems, some arising from differences in perceptions and objectives, others from seeing reality not matching rhetoric. Regardless, both the strengths and limitations of site-based management do affect program development and, more important, impact classroom implementation. The impact is often observed through the involvement and consistency (or lack of) of stakeholders, realistic timelines, and individual interpretations of implementation. Thus, the organizational context that established the Basic Literacy program must be considered a central factor of this research.

Summary

In essence, research studies (Calfee, 1994; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Powell et al., 2001; Sudol & Horning, 1999; Wagner, 1999) across disciplines have demonstrated the 'situatedness' of literacy, leading to the conviction that literacy cannot be defined, understood, learned, studied, or acquired independent of a social context. Moreover, no longer can it be assumed that there are natural or naturalistic conditions for learning literacy or, indeed, that literacy naturally follows from oral language development. The very constructed nature of literacy practices and the relationship between literacy, personal identity, cultural identity, and ideology undermine claims that all children in all social and cultural contexts learn literacy in the same way or through the same intervention.

Accordingly, the varied findings of reading intervention studies (Lingard, 1997; Pikulski, 1994) affirm the constructed nature of literacy. Although many interventions have been touted as providing excellent outcomes, subsequent independent research (Chapman & Tunmer, 1991; Glynn et al., 1989; Hicks &Villaume, 2001; Shanahan, 1987) has refuted and/or muted many of the results. There currently appears to be consensus in the research (Cassidy & Cassidy, 1999) that a balanced approach, recognizing the fluid nature of literacy, should be the basis for any literacy program. As Fitzgerald (1999) suggested, there is no single, right, balanced approach to teaching reading; rather, balance is a philosophical perspective based on the apparent needs of a specific class grouping.

Therefore, a philosophical perspective of literacy from which to align classroom practice should be considered a necessity. Even though the notion of literacy is elusive, the literature indicated that there are several definitions of literacy from which to align teaching practices (Cambourne, 2001). However, with regard to the Basic Literacy program, no definition was employed when the program was developed; thus only through the examination of teaching instruction after the fact could an inherent theory of literacy be identified. For the purposes of this study, Cambourne's lifelong investigation into the illusive nature and practical applications of literacy provides a thoughtful and detailed framework with which to examine the Basic Literacy program. Through group dialogue, individual questioning, and participant observation, Basic Literacy teachers construct meaning and share their knowledge individually through deep reflection of their own assumptions. This allows patterns of literacy teaching to emerge in the study conducted here.

Further, philosophical perspectives are shaped by and are very dependent upon the culture of the educational organization. The research literature is clear in that the cultures of the classroom, school, and district have an impact on delivery. The role of teacher, principal, superintendent, and school boards has changed dramatically over the past two decades. Empowering individuals and organizations has become a goal of many educational institutions. In this manner, decisions directly affecting the individual are best left to the individual. It was suggested that the decentralization of the locus of control would produce greater commitment to educational outcomes. However, it must be recognized that the skill level of empowered individuals varies considerably amongst teachers and administrators. One might question how this has impacted the implementation of programs such as the Basic Literacy program.

In my attempt to investigate, examine, and support the reading improvement initiative of one school district, several unexpected variables came to the forefront. The research findings presented in subsequent chapters provide insight into the disciplines of literacy, teaching, and school cultures. It is only through an examination of these variables that valid assertions about the reading improvement of students in the Basic Literacy program can be made.

CHAPTER 3

THE METHOD OF INQUIRY: GENERAL

Introduction to Case Study

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as being a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. Qualitative research further involves the collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, cultural texts, and productions—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand.

Case studies have become one of the most common ways to conduct qualitative inquiry. Stake (2000) asserted that case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. The case could be studied analytically or holistically, organically or culturally, or by mixed methods; but the emphasis is always on the case.

> A case may be simple or complex. It may be a child, or a classroom of children, or an incident such as a mobilization of professionals to study a childhood condition. It is one among others. In any given study, we will concentrate on the one. The time we may spend concentrating our inquiry on the one may be long or short, but while we so concentrate, we are engaged in case study. (p. 436)

Many case studies are both qualitative and quantitative in nature. In search of fundamental pursuits common to qualitative and quantitative research, Yin (1992) analyzed three research efforts. He identified four commitments that qualitative and quantitative research have in common: to bring expert knowledge to bear upon the phenomena studied, to round up all of the relevant data, to examine rival interpretations, and to ponder and prove the degree to which the findings have implication elsewhere. These commitments appear to be as important in case research as in any other kind of research.

Rationale for Using Case Study

Stake (2000) suggested that researchers have different purposes for studying cases. Case studies can be classified into three different types: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are undertaken when a researcher wants to better understand a particular case. It is not undertaken primarily because it represents other cases or because it illustrates some particular trait, characteristic, or problem. Rather, it is because of its uniqueness or ordinariness that a case becomes interesting and understood (Stake, 1994). The role of the researcher is not to understand or test abstract theory or to develop new theoretical explanations; instead, the intention is to better understand intrinsic aspects of the particular child, patient, organization, or whatever the case may be.

Instrumental case studies provide insights into an issue or refine a theoretical explanation. In these situations, the case actually becomes of secondary importance. It will serve only a supportive role, a background against which the actual research interests will play out. An instrumental case study often investigates a phenomenon in depth, and all aspects and activities are detailed, but not simply to elaborate the case. Instead, the intention is to assist the researcher to better understand some external theoretical question or problem. Instrumental case studies may or may not be viewed as typical of other cases. Collective case studies involve the extensive study of several instrumental cases. The selection of these cases is intended to allow better understanding or perhaps enhance the ability to theorize about a broader context.

The investigation of the Basic Literacy program appeared well suited to the case study approach. That is, the first two pilot years (1997-1999) of the Basic Literacy program were considered to be the case. The emphasis of the Basic Literacy case study was to investigate the program (during the pilot years) from a holistic perspective, which included all aspects of the program (student achievement, teacher practice, and administrative factors). Through employing the case study framework postulated by Stake (2000), the Basic Literacy program was further conceptualized as an intrinsic case because it was a *unique* approach to improved literacy competence and it captured the interest of the researcher.

However, Stake (2000) noted that "since researchers often have multiple interests, there is no solid line drawn between intrinsic and instrumental cases studies" (p. 437). It was the examination of literacy classroom practices that brought elements of an instrumental case study to the Basic Literacy research. The school board employed no foundational theoretical approach to literacy during the implementation of the program; therefore, the investigation of classroom practice could be completed only in a random fashion. In order to more fully understand the literacy classroom from a research paradigm, a comprehensive theoretical framework of literacy was used across the situations and sites. This allowed a 'window' though which the classroom practices of the Basic Literacy teachers could be investigated. It was in this manner that the case study of the Basic Literacy program was considered both intrinsic and instrumental.

Overall, the scientific benefit of the case study method lies in its ability to open the way for discoveries (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1990). It can easily serve as the breeding ground for insights and even hypotheses that may be pursued in subsequent studies.

Background of Case Study

Given the nature and purpose of a case study, it has traditionally been considered an approach under the discipline and practice of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) asserted that qualitative research operates in a complex historical field that crosscuts seven historical moments. "Our seven moments are meant to mark discernible shifts in style, genre, epistemology, ethics, politics and aesthetics" (p. 24). Given that the seven moments overlap and simultaneously operate in the present, Denzin and Lincoln defined them as the traditional (1900-1950); the modernist or golden age (1950-1970); blurred genres (1970-1986); the crisis of representation (1986-1990); the postmodern, a period of experimental and new ethnographies (1990-1995); postexperimental inquiry (1995-2000); and the future, which is now (2000–). The future, the seventh moment, is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities. The seventh moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, globalization, freedom, and community. Thus, "the modern case study is seen as a method of connecting qualitative research to the hope, needs, goals and promises of a free democratic society" (p. 3).

Responsibility of the Case Study

According to Stake (2000), the major conceptual responsibilities of the qualitative case researcher are as follows:

- bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study;
- selecting phenomena, themes, or issues; that is, the research questions to emphasize;
- seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;
- triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;
- selecting alternative interpretations to pursue; and
- developing assertions or generalizations about the case.

Except for the first of these, the steps are similar to those taken by other qualitative researchers. The more the researcher has intrinsic interest in the case, the more the focus of the study will be on the case's uniqueness, particular context, issues, and story. Case study is a part of scientific methodology, but its purpose is not limited to the advance of science. Case studies are of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability.

Case study can also be a disciplined force in public policy setting and reflection on human experience. Vicarious experience is an important basis for refining actions, options, and expectations. The purpose of the case report is not to represent the world, but rather to represent the case. "Criteria for conducting the kind of research that leads to valid generalization need modification to fit the search for effective particularization. The utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience" (Stake, 2000, p. 448).

The methods of qualitative case study are largely the methods of disciplining personal and particularized experience. With the Basic Literacy case study, two methods were employed for data collection and analysis: statistical analysis and interviewing. Although the interview technique is more commensurate with a naturalistic inquiry, the statistical analysis also enriches the case study. As noted by Yin (1992), qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined to ensure that all relevant data are collected.

Statistical Analysis

Cohen (2001) asserted:

> The term statistics can be used in at least two different ways. In one sense *statistics* refers to a collection of numerical facts such as a set of performance measures. They are organized into numerical forms. In a second sense, statistics refers to a branch of mathematics that is concerned with methods for understanding and summarizing collections of numbers. Therefore, statistics is a set of methods for dealing with numerical facts. Psychologists like other scientists refer to numerical facts as data. (p. 1)

Applied statistics describes methods for data analysis that have been worked out by statisticians but does not show how these methods were derived from more fundamental mathematical principles. One part of applied statistics is concerned only with summarizing the set of data a researcher has collected; this is referred to as *descriptive* statistics. However, most psychological research involves relatively small groups of people from which inferences are drawn about the larger population; this branch of statistics is referred to as *inferential* statistics. There are several procedures that are commonly used to create descriptive statistics. Although such methods can be used to describe data, it is quite common to use these descriptive statistics as the basis for inferential procedures. Descriptive statistics are required to demonstrate that there is a difference between two groups, and inferential statistics are concerned with the probability of obtaining a similar result with repetition. The Basic Literacy case study measured student achievement based on grade-equivalent scores. Overall, the statistical analysis for the Basic Literacy case study was descriptive in nature.

Interviewing

According to Gubrium and Holstein (2002), asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first. The spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and report or code the answers. Yet interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings. Interviewing is a paramount part of sociology, because interviewing is interaction and sociology is the study of interaction. Thus the interview becomes both the tool and the object, an encounter in which both parties behave as though they are of equal status for its duration, whether or not this is actually so.

The interview has existed and changed over time, both as a practice and as a methodological term. However, the practice has not always been theorized or distinguished from other modes of acquiring information. Interviewing has sometimes been treated as a distinct method, but more often it has been located within some broader methodological category such as survey, case study, or life story (Platt, 2002).

A leading model of interviewing that is typical of survey research conceives of the interview as a face-to-face conversation with a purpose. The conversation occurs between two unacquainted individuals, the interviewer and the interviewee or respondent. Their roles are viewed as distinct; one asks questions and the other provides the answers. Much of the conventional methodological wisdom bearing on this model is built on the distinction and largely centers on the role of the interviewer. Less attention is paid to the respondent; it is taken for granted that if the interviewer does a good job, the respondent's work will fall into place. The interviewer is provided the slate of questions and is afforded the latitude to probe or invite as detailed responses as are warranted.

> The interviewer's job is to bring the respondent's full attention to the task and to encourage him or her to answer honestly, but otherwise not shape or influence the responses. The interviewer aims for neutrality and objectivity. His or her role is to facilitate responses that the respondent is primed to give. Standardization is key. (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 267)

In other forms of interviewing the rules or expectations for the behavior of the interviewer are relaxed. Qualitative and in-depth interviewing is more exploratory, theory driven, and collaborative. The interviewer has greater freedom to raise topics, formulate questions, and move in new directions. The interviewer sees his/her relationship with the respondent as extended, open-ended exchange, focused on particular topics and the related subject matter that emerges in the interview process. The exchange is designed not so much to collect the facts, as it were, but to gather information that meaningfully frames the configuration and salience of those facts in the interviewee's life.

The nuances of understanding and the depths of experience are especially important in interviewing. The qualitative interview is, to put it simply, focused on the qualities of respondents' experiences. This is not constructed primarily in evaluatory terms as in measures of the quality of life or the quality of care, but rather rests on the assumption that whatever the subject matter, it can have diverse qualities or meanings in people's experience. The aim of qualitative interviewing is to ascertain those qualities and their social organization. In this manner, several contextual variables were considered within this study. These included the Basic Literacy teachers, the Basic Literacy classroom, and the experiences of the researcher.

The Basic Literacy Teachers

In order to provide a context for the Basic Literacy study, the background of the three participating literacy teachers was examined. Each teacher, along with the school that employed her, was assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The Oakville Elementary Basic Literacy teacher was identified as Ann, the Sunnybrook elementary Basic Literacy teacher as Sally, and the Hillside Junior High Basic Literacy teacher as Judy. The sample of the Basic Literacy teachers was chosen randomly and considered to be a representative sample of the original 12 Basic Literacy teachers in the district.

The teachers' involvement in the research project included two individual audiotaped interviews with the researcher. A group dialogue followed this with two teacher participants in which the themes identified by the researcher were reviewed and confirmed. All interviews were conducted in the respective teacher's Basic Literacy classroom. Participant observations occurred in two of the interviewed teacher's classrooms, one on a daily basis during the first two years of the program, and the other on two separate occasions during the data-collection process.

Two of the three teachers interviewed acknowledged that educational training was essential to their current success in the literacy program. Ann stated, "I do think that my educational background has had a positive effect on the literacy class with my Bachelor of Arts in anthropology and linguistics, as well as my Bachelor of Education in special needs." Ann further asserted that studying the semantic and syntactical components of varying languages and training in the special education program, which focused on how children learn to read, proved to be a powerful combination in teaching the Basic Literacy program. Sally was currently working on her master's degree in elementary education, with a focus on language arts and literacy. Sally, employed at Sunnybrook School, believed that "having an early childhood background, working with children in Grades K to 3, and graduate coursework provided a foundation in language development and has certainly helped in the teaching of the literacy program." Judy, the teacher at Hillside School, identified her educational background as being in elementary education in the generalist program. Judy commented, "I have a psychology minor, but that did not help me with what I am teaching right now; rather, it was the experiences as a teacher intern that proved to be the most beneficial." All three literacy teachers have continued with a variety of professional development and inservicing activities of their own volition.

The seasoned literacy educators (Ann and Sally) who were interviewed had multiple experiences teaching a wide range of students; thus they were able to utilize a variety of strategies over the years. Their teaching experiences included teaching deaf and hearing impaired children at the Glenrose hospital, whole-school programming in which they blocked off an entire morning and children throughout the school were grouped based on their instructional level regardless of grade level, transition programs for kindergarten children, teaching regular and combined groupings, and resource room teaching. The resource room models were diverse: either the traditional pullout model or working with both teachers and students in the homeroom class. Teachers cited advantages and disadvantages of both resource room models.

All teachers interviewed asserted that experiences in elementary/early childhood were a direct benefit to the literacy program, especially for the junior high teacher, who had to rely on her elementary training with the older students. This was because these students were all working at a much younger grade level. Sally observed that when she taught Grade 1, some of the strategies or tools used as motivators or to assist with decoding were drawn upon when working with the literacy students. Judy further identified team teaching and experiences with multiple groupings as being of benefit in teaching the literacy program.

The Basic Literacy Classroom

The participant observations further allowed the researcher to be immersed in the culture and context of the Basic Literacy classrooms. All three of the classrooms were spacious and had several learning 'areas' within the room. The desks were situated either in groups or a semicircle, which appeared to be a significant advantage of having only 14 students in the room. Regardless of configuration, the classroom environment was clearly established to foster peer interaction and dialogue. During all observations, the researcher noted that the students were accustomed to the environment, 'talked' freely, and remained on topic.

Throughout the two elementary classrooms, evidence of print materials was abundant. It appeared that the purpose of this material was to immerse the students in language as a form of stimulation. It was noted that students continually capitalized on and utilized the language posted around them. The Basic Literacy teachers would also refer to these print materials when teaching a lesson or assisting an individual student. The researcher also observed several examples of students utilizing this material as one form of a graphic organizer.

Print examples from the environment in Ann's classroom included "Meet the Stars," which encouraged children to have their home agendas signed, and "Smiles of Success," which posted student writing samples and reading milestones. In Sally's classroom several reading and writing strategies were listed, including "*Reading Strategies*—use the picture, think, look at the beginning, re-read sentences, skip the word and read on, sound it out, use a dictionary, ask someone"; and "*Editing*

Strategies—reread your writing, underline words, use arrows, add punctuation, and identify a new paragraph." All three Basic Literacy classrooms posted word walls and listings of high-frequency words. Word walls are a technique in which children post sight words once they have encountered them within the context of their reading.

Further, a great deal of the environmental print was related to other subject areas including social studies and science. This included "Underground to Canada," "Current Events," "The Daily Weather" (including graphing of weather for each month), and charting of "Temperature." Of note is the fact that the junior high classroom had a minimal amount of environmental print posted on the walls, and when queried, Judy responded:

> It is done consciously as I have to recognize the social and emotional level of these children. For the junior high children there is a fine balance between providing stimulation and the students feeling like they are being treated as elementary children.

Each literacy classroom had established a classroom library. Within the libraries, was a wide range of literature, including books and magazines. The quality of literature and print material appeared to reflect a wide range of levels to appeal to the varying reading abilities of the students. The junior high literacy classroom reading collection appeared to be based more on low vocabulary and high interest, which Judy identified as "difficult to find." All three of the classrooms had several computers located throughout the room. Students utilized these for writing projects, but also for working through reading programs when class assignments were completed.

A significant benefit of participant observations is the rich descriptions of the learning environment that they provide to the researcher. The descriptions allude to the multiple language experiences that are occurring, an understanding of how language is integrated throughout the learning day, and insight into the Basic Literacy experience as perceived by the students.

The Researcher

Commensurate with a naturalistic inquiry, the context of the researcher's personal experiences is requisite to demonstrate the origin of research interest (Munhall, 2000). The researcher has observed and participated in the education of students with literacy difficulties for 15 years. This involvement occurred at varying levels of education, including as a regular classroom teacher, resource room teacher, and school administrator. Throughout the researcher's career, students who did not seem able to learn the simplest concepts associated with reading, writing, spelling, or math, but nevertheless showed evidence of being able to learn and apply more complex knowledge and skill in the everyday world, remained perplexing.

The prevailing explanation of why these children failed to learn in school was often couched in terms including *deficit* or *deficiency* (Cambourne, 1995). This deficiency comprised a tangible neurological impairment, a less tangible disabling learning condition, a cultural deficiency, or all of the above. The researcher pursued deeper understanding of deficiency issues through graduate studies in an attempt to provide effective classroom assistance for these types of students. The researcher employed a whole-language technique when instructing in the regular classroom; however, no systemic instruction was provided for students who were delayed in literacy development.

Thus, the researcher began studies in language and cognition to better understand the acquisition of language and cultural influence on literacy. This allowed the researcher to incorporate a constructivist framework of language arts into the classroom. Subsequently, the researcher also employed various reading remedial techniques, including the Lindamood Auditory Discrimination program, to small groups in a resource room setting. However, this too remained ineffective because there appeared to be no transference of skills for these students once they returned to the regular classroom.

During that period, the researcher pursued graduate studies in the area of educational psychology.

At the same time, the researcher began to view the literacy issue from an administrative perspective. The school district requested the researcher to open one of the Basic Literacy sites at his school in 1997. At that point, the Basic Literacy program had already been conceived by central administrators therefore, the researcher had minimal knowledge of the dialogue/development that occurred during the inception stage. The researcher remained principal of a Basic Literacy site for the first three years of the program, which provided first hand observations as the program continued to evolve. It was within this context that the Basic Literacy research was conceived. The dual role of Basic Literacy administrator and researcher did not impose limitations on the Basic Literacy study.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the literature in research design and methodological procedure chosen. Case studies have proven to be an effective methodology for both qualitative and quantitative studies. The case study appeared most effective in 'bounding' the Basic Literacy research to that which was to be studied: the first two pilot years of the program. As a research technique, the Basic Literacy analysis utilized both an open-ended in-depth interviewing technique and a statistical analysis. The interviews were in-depth in nature, but they did not delve into the deeper emotional realm. The statistical analysis was descriptive in nature. As cited in this chapter, these research approaches and techniques have been well supported in the literature. It was believed that the combination of these techniques would provide the most holistic perspective from which to approach the Basic Literacy program.

CHAPTER 4

THE METHOD OF INQUIRY: APPLIED

Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple sources of data including student achievement, attitudinal survey data, teacher beliefs, and classroom methods were examined. The overall data collection and analysis were completed in two different ways. The first set of data collected was to provide a comparative analysis consistent with quantitative research methodology. As previously noted, the purpose of the empirical data analysis was to answer the following two research questions:

1. Was there an overall improvement in reading comprehension performance during the first two years of the Basic Literacy program (1997-1999)? Were there differences between the junior high school and elementary school performances?
2. How did the reading comprehension scores of students in the elementary and junior high Basic Literacy program compare with those of schoolmates in the regular elementary and junior high program?

Statistical Sample Selection

The sample utilized for this study was at-risk students who were seen to be displaying severe delays in reading and writing. This at-risk student population was identified as Basic Literacy students (Grades 4-9) and enrolled in the urban school district's pilot Basic Literacy program in 1997. Although the program enrollment increased in recent years, the sample size of this study was confined to the original 118 students over the initial two-year pilot period (1997-1999). Each participant in the sample attended a Basic Literacy site. There were five junior high school and nine elementary school sites situated throughout the urban jurisdiction. All children were to receive instruction as per the program goals. The complete Basic Literacy program goals, organization, entrance criteria, and expectations are included in Appendix A. The school district reported a significant amount of historical data for this sample. This included achievement data and site-based assessments administered throughout the first two years of the Basic Literacy program.

Statistical Data Collection

Statistical achievement data were collected between 1997 and 1999. The following instruments were administered to all literacy students **prior to admission to the literacy program:**

- WISC-III (verbal IQ, performance IQ, full scale IQ)
- Academic Achievement Measures (Woodcock Johnson, Kaufman, WIAT)
- Behavioral Checklists (eight categories derived by school district; Appendix B).

When the Basic Literacy program was initially developed, it was further decided that the following instruments were to be administered to all Basic Literacy students **at the end of each year:**

- HLAT Reading and Writing Measures
- Attitudinal surveys (teaching staff, administrators, students, and parents).

The Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) data were presumed to be the most consistent measure utilized throughout all schools. The HLAT program provided student, school, and district information that differed from the data reported on provincial achievement tests. Specifically, the HLATs provided annual grade level of achievement for district students registered in Grades 1 to 9 and information about student performance in reading and writing. As cited in a school board report (urban school board 1999), the HLAT program was established as a means for students, teachers, and parents to make individual programming decisions.

The HLAT reading test consisted of the reading comprehension subtest of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). The internal consistency reliability coefficients for the five main area scores on the CTBS range from .83 to .96; composite reliability is at least .97 for all grades. With regard to validity, the CTBS asserts that each test in the battery is constructed according to specifications reflecting currently accepted curricular practices, and then is reviewed by curriculum specialists. However, the school district did not employ the actual grade score norms established by CTBS; rather, the district identified a range of raw scores for each grade level in order to provide an approximate grade level of achievement.

The HLAT writing test was a locally developed. Student writing was marked by classroom teachers, who submitted a grade level of achievement and a performance score for each piece of writing. The performance score was based on three criteria: *limited* performance, *adequate* performance and *proficient* performance. Exemplars of writing performance were provided to teachers for each grade level. Teachers were trained in the marking of writing HLAT's at each individual site. This most often occurred through grade groupings where teachers at each grade level shared student work and their corresponding assessment. This method was utilized as a method of internal reliability. In addition, the school district would audit three writing samples from each grade level at each site.

Statistical Data Analysis

The Basic Literacy achievement data were transferred into an Excel program and then analyzed through Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS). The researcher was also provided with a random sample of 118 HLAT scores from the regular student population at five of the literacy sites. The purpose was to provide a data set for both a treatment and a nontreatment group. All data sets were entered as raw scores and then converted to grade equivalent scores as identified by the CTBS normative tables.

Descriptive analyses were initially completed for both sets of data, to be followed by a 'repeated measures analysis' or ANOVA (Glass & Hopkins, 1996) of the treatment and nontreatment groups. Once the descriptive analyses were completed, it became apparent that several factors were needed in order to meet the requirements of statistical analysis. These assumptions included independence of observation between subjects, homogeneity of variance, and normality of error (Cohen, 2001; Glass & Hopkins, 1996). The HLAT data were chosen because the urban school board utilized this tool as a standard academic measure for all schools. In this manner, the HLAT data would provide rich descriptive data, which included demographic and academic information based on grade equivalent scores for the majority of students.

Attitudinal Survey Data

As is standard procedure within the school district, attitudinal information is collected from program stakeholders of various educational programs. This information is gathered from an anonymous survey at the end of each school year. The survey information reported in this study is from the end of the first year (1998) and from the end of the third year (2000) of the Basic Literacy program. The information is garnered and cited from school board reports dated September 8, 1998, and December 13, 2000. A synthesis of the attitudinal data was provided as a means to further a holistic investigation of the Basic Literacy program, which was commensurate with the instrumental case study approach.

Interview Data Collection

The second phase of data collection and analysis was centered on interviews with three Basic Literacy teachers and participant observations in two Basic Literacy classrooms. These data were collected in an attempt to understand the Basic Literacy classroom in a manner consistent with qualitative research methodology. As previously noted, the naturalistic inquiry was conducted to answer the following five research questions:

1. Which teaching strategies appeared to be employed in the Basic Literacy classroom?

2. Were the teaching strategies employed commensurate with proven successful literacy learning practices?

3. What other site (school) level variables, if any, have affected instruction within the Basic Literacy program?

4. What school district level variables, if any, have affected the delivery of the Basic Literacy program?

5. Overall, were educational stakeholders (administration, staff, students, parents, and community) satisfied with the Basic Literacy program?

Semistructured interviews were conducted with the Basic Literacy teachers. This method was chosen to help to understand the experience of the teachers and the meaning that they made of that experience. The open-ended (in-depth) interview was conducted in conjunction with Basic Literacy participant observation. Many qualitative researchers have differentiated between the interview and observation, yet as Fontana and Frey (2000) noted, the two go hand in hand, and much of the data gathered in participant observation come from informal interviewing in the field. It is currently recognized that to pit one type of interviewing against another is a futile effort, a leftover from the paradigmatic quantitative-versus-qualitative debate. Thus, an increasing number of researchers are using multimethod approaches to achieve broader and often better results. This is referred to as triangulation (Denzin, 1989). A protocol of interview questions (Appendix B) was posited in a consistent manner to all participants. The interview questions were generally designed to include information about the Basic Literacy teachers, students, classroom instruction, and implementation of the Basic Literacy program. However, these questions were used only as a starting point for individual and open dialogue. Although semistructured, the interviews followed topics of interests as dictated by the participants.

Interview Data Analysis

"Educators today face a complex teaching environment. The critical incident technique (CIT) is an appropriate qualitative research tool used for gaining an understanding of the nature of specific classroom settings. It is particularly well suited for examining events considered to be examples of success or failure (Redmann et al., 2000). An effective qualitative approach that was utilized to obtain an in-depth analytical description of the Basic Literacy interview data was the CIT. This approach employs the interview method because behavior occurs in a context; an accurate understanding of the behavior requires understanding of the context in which it occurs. Therefore, having an understanding of that context can lead to a better understanding of the behavior. It has been defined as a set of procedures for systematically identifying behaviors that contribute to the success or failure of individuals or organizations in specific situations.

The structure of the CIT involves four phases; (a) developing plans and specifications for collecting factual incidents, (b) collecting episodes/critical incidents from knowledgeable individuals, (c) identifying themes in the critical incidents and sorting the incidents into proposed content categories, and (d) interpreting and reporting. The data can be collected from participant observations and/or from viable self-reports (interviews). The CIT was utilized for the first stage of analysis in the Basic Literacy research. Specifically, it was employed in the following manner: The protocol of interview questions was developed in an attempt to provide insight and answers to the broader Basic Literacy research questions. The interview questions were then posited to three Basic Literacy teachers during individual conferences. The teacher responses were considered to be episodes or critical incidents and were categorized into broad-based themes, which were provided to the teacher subjects for a final opportunity to clarify or confirm the themes, satisfying inter-rater agreement.

For the second stage of analysis, literacy teaching practices were the central tenet. Any interview data that directly related to teaching practices were analyzed and coded a second time using Cambourne's (2001) framework of literacy learning. The eight conditions employed included immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibility, approximation, use, and response. The data gathered from participant observations were also incorporated into this stage of analysis. This allowed for the identification of evidence, or lack thereof, which would suggest that a theory of literacy underpinned the Basic Literacy classroom instruction.

Credibility and Transferability

Every aspect of the structure, process, and practice of interviewing can be directed toward the goal of minimizing the effect of the interviewer and the interviewing situation on how the participants reconstruct their experience.

> The fact is that interviewers are a part of the interviewing picture. They ask questions, respond to the participant and at times even share their own experiences. Moreover, interviewers work with the material, select from it, interpret, describe and analyze it. Though they may be disciplined and dedicated to keeping the interviews as the participants' meaning-making process, interviewers are also a part of that process. (Seidman, 1998, p. 99)

Recognizing the interaction between the data gatherers and the participants is inherent to the nature of interviewing and participant observations. The process of in-depth interviewing recognizes and affirms the role of the instrument, the human interviewer.

Seidman (1998) asserted that the interview process incorporates the features that enhance the accomplishment of validity. It places participants' comments in context. It encourages participants to review and account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say. Furthermore, when a number of participants are interviewed, the experience can check the comments of one participant against those of others. Finally, the goal of the interview process is to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience. If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, then it is has validity. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), an in-depth description showing the complexities of variables and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid. The literacy interviews provided credibility in that they demonstrated the complexities of the interactions between the teacher and students, teacher and parents, and teacher and school board.

Trustworthiness

Implementing member checking into the process enhanced the trustworthiness of the data collected. Participants were asked to review the preliminary findings based on their particular interview in order to confirm, seek clarification, or expand on the themes identified. Additionally, each participant was given the opportunity to review a written transcript from her taped interview. An emphasis on open-ended questions during the interviews minimized the opportunity for the introduction of researcher bias. Minimizing researcher bias was further assisted by engaging a colleague in verifying the results during the various stages of data analysis. An audit trail was established by accurately documenting the information obtained and the procedures followed during each phase of the study.

The triangulated data-gathering mechanisms identified earlier involved a variation in both the sources of data and the methods of collection. As a result, the credibility in the way the study was conducted was strengthened, as was the confirmability with respect to its findings. Review of appropriate documentation and stringent recording of observations in the form of field notes allowed for comparative analysis to enhance the validity of conclusions reached. Owing to the potential sensitivity of the information obtained, interviews were conducted privately, in a professional manner, with both a written and oral assurance of confidentiality. It was hoped that these factors, together with the researcher's background, would help to lessen any participant apprehension. It is believed that the researcher's experience as a student, educator, and administrator served to establish credibility by his conducting the study in a sensitive manner.

Delimitations

Delimitations, according to Creswell (1994), refer to those aspects of the study that will narrow its scope. This study included the following delimitations:

1. The HLAT tool, as a means for measuring reading improvement, did not stand up to statistical rigor nor was it administered in a systematic manner or setting.
2. The study examined the Basic Literacy program through anonymous stakeholder surveys. Only three Basic Literacy teachers directly participated in the study.

Limitations

Limitations refer to the potential weaknesses in a study (Creswell, 1994). This study included the following limitations:

1. The use of individuals as information sources included the inherent limitation created by the possible incongruity between what the informants state that they do and what they actually do.
2. This study was limited by the use of a single researcher and by the possible confusions of meaning inherent in human communication by virtue of variance of viewpoints and perceptions.

Ethical Considerations

To comply with the requirements listed in the documents *University Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants* and *Cooperative Activities Proposal*, the following procedures were utilized to protect the participants in the study:

1. Written permission to conduct the study within the school district was obtained.
2. The study's purpose and process were clearly explained to assessment officials from central office and the three Basic Literacy teachers prior to gaining access to the data and interviews.
3. Achievement data were considered to be property of the school board; thus no parental or student consent was required.
4. No identification of students was made on the achievement data provided to the researcher.
5. Data (audiotapes, field notes, transcripts, achievement scores) were filed in a secure location. All information collected during the research was treated as confidential.
6. Schools and school personnel participating in the study were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.
7. Participants were informed that they could opt out of the study without penalty at any time during the study.

The study proposal was submitted to an Ethics Review Committee in the Department of Educational Psychology, and the appropriate approval was granted.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe how the research design and methodological procedures were applied in this study. Commensurate with naturalistic inquiry, descriptions were also provided with regard to the participants and classroom environment. This chapter has also addressed concerns related to the trustworthiness of the data and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

As previously noted, the study of the Basic Literacy program provided an opportunity for both a quantitative and a qualitative investigation. The overall data collection and analysis was completed in two different ways. This chapter reports the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data collection and investigation.

Quantitative Findings

The purpose of the quantitative data analysis was to determine whether literacy competence (reading comprehension) improved for the Basic Literacy students. In addition, the HLAT descriptive statistics allowed a comparative analysis of reading achievement to be conducted. First, reading gains were compared between the Basic Literacy elementary students and the Basic Literacy junior high students. Second, reading gains were compared between all Basic Literacy students (treatment group) and a sample of the regular student population (nontreatment group).

HLAT Sample Selection

For this stage of analysis, the treatment and nontreatment data were analyzed as descriptive data. Table 1 provides the N values for gender within both the treatment and the nontreatment groups.

Table 1

N Values for Gender, Treatment, Nontreatment, and Total

	Treatment	Nontreatment	Total
Male	87	67	154
Female	31	32	63
Total	118	99	217

HLAT Data

Of the 217 sample population, 154 HLAT results were provided to the researcher. This is a result of several factors. First, the Grades 3, 6, and 9 students, as well as the high school students, were not required to complete HLATs because these students complete provincial achievement exams. Second, a percentage of the treatment sample was enrolled in high school by 1999; thus no HLAT data were available. Third, a percentage of the literacy students were either absent or exempted from writing the HLAT. Fourth, in 1997 the school district was just beginning to track HLAT data through the central School Information System (SIS).

Reading HLAT ANOVA Analysis

In order to complete a repeated measure ANOVA on the HLAT reading data, several statistical assumptions were required. These assumptions included independence of observation between subjects, homogeneity of variance, and normality of error (Cohen, 2001; Glass & Hopkins, 1996). In the Basic Literacy study, independence of observation was not an issue because the results were not dependent upon each other. The nontreatment sample was chosen randomly from the regular student population at five of the literacy sites. Second, it was assumed that the dependent variable followed a normal distribution in the population for each treatment level. Third, there were an equal number of observations at each treatment level, so homogeneity was assumed. Fourth, the homogeneity of covariance was required. Box's test of Equality of Covariance was completed and was not significant (p. <05). The latter two assumptions can be relaxed as long as the assumption of sphericity greater than .75 is met. Utilizing the HLAT grade equivalent scores, Mauchly's test of sphericity was completed, with the Huynh-Feldt Epsilon being reported at .661. The assumptions of an ANOVA were not met; therefore a repeated measure analysis could not be carried out.

Further, a closer examination of the HLAT data revealed inconsistencies in HLAT test levels administered at each grade level. This information is presented in Table 2. The researcher went back to the raw data and discovered the variability in the test levels of any given grade between 1997 and 1999. In Grade 8 the test levels ranged from 8 to 15. At Grade 7 there was a range from test levels 11 to 15. At Grade 6 there was a range from test levels 9 to 12. At Grade 5 there was a range from test levels 7 to 13. At Grade 4 there was a range from test levels 7 to 12. In Grade 8, 27 students received a range of eight HLAT test levels.

HLAT Reading Comparative Analysis

A comparative table based on the HLAT reading comprehension scores was completed. This analysis was conducted utilizing HLAT grade equivalent scores between 1997 and 1999. The results of the comparative analysis are presented in Table 3.

As previously noted, the HLAT was administered to 154 of the 217 sample population. However, of the 154 raw score results provided, only 99 were deemed appropriate to convert into grade equivalent scores based on the CTBS normative data. Several factors affected the conversion from HLAT raw scores into CTBS grade equivalent scores. First, the school district did not utilize the CTBS normative data but, rather, based grade level of achievement on a locally developed range of raw scores.

Table 2

HLAT Test Levels Administered to Treatment Group for 1997, 1998, and 1999

		Treatment group									
		HLAT test levels									
Grade	Year	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total
8	1997		1			1	1		1		4
8	1998			1	1	2	2	1	1	2	10
8	1999				1			1		1	3
7	1997					3		6			9
7	1998					1	4		3		8
7	1999					1	2	1		2	6
6	1997			4	4	1	11				20
6	1998			2	7	5	4	1			19
6	1999		3	3		6	2	4	1		19
5	1997	1	1	2	3	5					12
5	1998	1	3	4		6	1				15
5	1999		2	1	2	3	3	4			15
4	1997	3	2	3	16						24
4	1998	2	7	7	6	2					24
4	1999		2	7	9	7	4				29

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Treatment and Nontreatment Reading HLAT Grade Equivalent Scores at Both the Elementary and Junior High School Level

	Elementary				Junior high				Total	
	Treatment (n = 21)		Nontreatment (n = 51)		Treatment (n = 6)		Nontreatment (n = 21)		(n= 99)	
Year	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)
1997	3.31	1.28	5.51	2.66	4.76	.816	5.13	1.38	4.92	2.26
1998	4.41	1.00	3.91	1.47	5.10	.769	6.27	.955	4.59	1.54
1999	5.01	1.14	6.06	9.01	6.08	1.11	7.14	.860	6.07	6.51

Second, the locally developed range of raw scores was wide in relation to any one grade level of achievement. Third, teachers chose the test level to administer based on the instructional level of the student, which produced variance in the test levels administered (see Table 2). Therefore, the enrolled grade level of the student might not be commensurate (outside of the CTBS normative tables) with the test level administered. These factors affected 55 of the HLAT raw scores, thereby reducing N to 99.

Reading gains were compared between the elementary Basic Literacy students and the junior high Basic Literacy students. However, due to the data-processing difficulties, reading gains could not be asserted with any degree of confidence or statistical rigor. The following results are observations only, which appear to demonstrate that general reading abilities improved for both sets of the Basic Literacy students. The average reading increases for the elementary Basic Literacy students seem relatively larger than those for the junior high Basic Literacy students. This may suggest that early reading intervention (i.e. at the elementary school level) produces better results than those achieved by students who do not receive reading intervention until junior high school.

It should be noted that all of the nontreatment means were higher than those for the treatment groups. There was however, one exception, the 1998 treatment mean of 4.41 was higher than the nontreatment mean of 3.91. The author cannot explain this anomaly.

Further, the elementary students' results appear to approach one year's growth in reading for every year in school during the trial period. Throughout the qualitative interviews, the Basic Literacy teachers identified their goal as one year of reading growth (HLAT) for each year in the program. The comparative results suggest that the students were making gains in this direction. Both the elementary and the junior high Basic Literacy students' improvement in reading performance was noteworthy, given that these students may not have demonstrated this pace of reading growth prior to enrollment in the program. As identified by the program entrance criteria, the students were to have been three years behind for elementary students and four years behind for junior high students as measured on the HLAT. Due to the data-processing difficulties, no other comparisons were warranted.

In sum, the overall quantitative data demonstrated that literacy competence might have improved for the students enrolled in the Basic Literacy program. However, these gains could not be asserted with any degree of confidence. The results do appear to indicate that, given changes in the administration of appropriate test levels, normative data, and increased participation rates, reading gains might have been asserted in a more statistical manner.

Attitudinal Survey Data

As is standard procedure within the school district, attitudinal information is collected from program stakeholders of alternative programs. This information is gathered through an anonymous survey at the end of each school year. The Basic Literacy survey information is directly extrapolated from two school board reports dated September 8, 1998, and December 13, 2000. The attitudinal data provided student and parent perceptions of the Basic Literacy program during the trial period of 1997-1999. The data were considered a viable component of the research because they enhanced a holistic perspective, which is required when conducting an instrumental case study.

1998 Attitudinal Report

At the end of the first year of the Basic Literacy program, parents, staff, and students were surveyed to determine how efficacious the program was in meeting its objectives and to identify any issues that needed to be resolved.

Parent Response

A summary of parent responses is presented in Table 4, followed by parent responses to several open-ended questions. This survey was unique in nature; it was mailed only to parents of the original 118 students in the Basic literacy program and was not considered to be part of the regular school district survey. This survey was deemed important, because it followed the first year of the program, and feedback was necessary.

The researcher assisted in writing the Basic Literacy survey questions as part of his administrative duties. Parental feedback was limited because only 24% of parents returned the survey forms. The survey information was compiled and presented to the public school board by the researcher. At the time of presentation, it appeared that the school board trustees were satisfied with the results.

Open-Ended Questions and Responses as Cited on Parent Survey (1998)

What do you like about your child's school program?

- *Everything about this program is great.*
- *My child is receiving the extra help they need.*
- *The teacher is terrific.*
- *The one-on-one teaching is excellent, as is the student/teacher ratio.*
- *For the first time in seven years my child likes school and is able to prepare his homework more independently.*
- *My child enjoys school because he feels comfortable and confident to do the work.*
- *My child has learned and improved so much.*
- *This program takes his individual needs and meets them.*
- *That the program is run by a trained teacher in learning disabilities, using a variety of strategies to teach improvement in reading and writing skills.*

What would you like to change about your child's school program?

- *Nothing (most common response).*
- *Screen out students with behavior or social problems.*
- *Have the program available until Grade 12.*
- *More homework.*

Table 4

1998 Literacy Parent Survey (N=28)

	Proportion of parents responding				
Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Undecided
My child's reading skills are improving	57%	39%	4%		
My child's writing skills are improving	46%	54%			
My child's math skills are improving	29%	54%	4%		13%
My child is learning to manage behavior	29%	54%		4%	13%
My child's self-confidence is improving	43%	39%	14%		4%
My child likes school	39%	54%	7%		
*My child receives the help he/she needs	61%	32%			
*The school listens to my concerns	54%	39%			
I receive enough information about:					
• what my child is expected to learn	39%	50%	11%		
• how my child is expected to behave	50%	50%			
• how my child is progressing	46%	54%			
• how to help my child at home	36%	57%	4%		3%

* 7% of parents did not respond to this question.

Additional Comments

- *The literacy program was an excellent idea.*
- *There needs to be more of these programs.*
- *The program should go from Grade 1 to Grade 12.*
- *The change in our child is remarkable. She is happy and content to go to school. This is such a change.*

Of those parents who responded, 96% agreed that their child's reading skills had improved. It was assumed that this assertion was based on the fluency, frequency, and quality of reading that occurred at home. All parents surveyed asserted that their child's writing skills had improved based on the written work that students brought home. Further, 83% reported that their children's mathematics skills had improved, and 82% reported improved self-confidence. All parents except two reported that their children liked school. It was suggested that the Basic Literacy program be extended to the early childhood and high school grades. Parents further asserted that the school listened to their concerns and that they received sufficient information from the school about how their children were progressing and what they were expected to learn.

Staff Response

Survey data for teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators are presented in Tables 5 and 6, followed by samples of responses to open-ended questions. In 1998 the staff surveys had a high response rate (N=35) of 98%. In comparison to the parent response rate, the staff response rate is typically higher because it was administered on site during the workday. Although all staff groups were represented, the staff survey did not discern between teachers', teacher assistants', and administrators' responses. In hindsight, this would have been of benefit to both the school district and the Basic Literacy research.

Table 5

1998 Literacy Staff Survey (N=35)

Questions	Responses			
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
How well are we meeting each of the objectives of the program as set out in the draft program goals:				
• To increase literacy skills to a level that enables the student to success in a less restrictive environment		3	28	4
• To improve school skills such as selection of appropriate strategies, organization, planning		3	28	4
• To help students understand their learning problems and be an advocate for themselves in the classroom		7	16	12
• To develop positive attitudes toward school and learning		1	22	12
How effective is each of the following in providing an accurate picture of growth?				
• HLAT assessments	4	11	17	3
• formal academic assessments		7	20	8
• report card marks		10	23	3
• behavioral checklists		3	26	6
• IPP goals		4	18	13
• parent satisfaction	2	7	23	1
• student satisfaction		2	24	9

Table 6

1998 Literacy Staff Survey Continued (N=35)

	Responses			
Question	Not at all important	Not very important	Important	Very important
How important do you feel that each of the following is to the success of the program?				
• Class size			3	32
• Teaching expertise			5	30
• Emphasis on literacy			4	31
• Team/collaboration		2	13	20
• Diagnostic strategies		1	11	23
• Teacher aide	1	2	14	18
• Technology		2	28	5
• Resources			12	23
• Individualized plans		1	18	16

Open-Ended Questions and Responses as Cited on Staff Survey (1998)

What other important objectives are there for the program?

- *To develop positive/home school communication. I believe we should strive for excellence in meeting the program objectives*
- *To establish consistent positive work habits at school and at home, taking responsibility for their learning*
- *Social skills training*
- *To develop self-esteem and recognition of personal strengths and needs. To develop an environment where risk-taking is safe*
- *Improved school attendance*

What other important factors are there in program success?

- *Multi-grade scope and sequence of skills/knowledge for all subject areas*
- *Behavior and attitude of student toward working and learning*
- *Good attendance*
- *Parental support and involvement*
- *Regular completion of homework*
- *Teacher and aide working as a team*
- *Inservice, staff support, regular meetings of teachers from all sites*

Are there better ways of demonstrating achievement and growth or program success? What are they?

- *Common assessment package to be used by all schools*
- *Daily classroom work/assignments. Assessment is using a variety of means. Report cards are a poor indication of growth for special-needs students, especially in math, social studies and science.*
- *Checklists or running records to show growth particularly when a full year's gain is not achieved*
- *Academic diagnostic assessments such as Alberta Diagnostic Reading or Qualitative Reading Inventory*
- *Weekly one-on-one teacher student reading and individual assessments (taped readings, paired reading)*
- *Using a flow chart to program child's academic growth and program growth*

The literacy program is designed as a two-year program. Do you agree that integration is a possibility after two years?

- *The deficits are so extreme when students enter the program that two years to bring students to level of peers will rarely be sufficient.*
- *We have to remember whom we are dealing with in our literacy programs. They are at the first percentile; they have been in school three to eight years*

and have learned very little. They have severe memory problems. Few will ever get back into a regular class.

- *There are many factors, but if the student's problems are purely academic—then integration is realistic. Other students with behavioral problems plus great language deficit—two years may be unrealistic.*
- *For the most part, the students not making gains are those with behavior issues, poor attendance and instability in their home life.*
- *Integration is possible for most so long as teachers modify and integrate appropriately.*

In an attempt to develop literacy skills, other subject areas receive less time and emphasis. Do you agree with this approach to instruction?

- *We can't increase emphasis on literacy without decreasing emphasis on something else. How can these students handle any other subjects when they cannot read?*
- *It's about time we considered individual student "need" on an equal "footing" with provincial curriculum.*
- *They still need exposure to all subjects, but certainly they must be proficient in reading and writing to be able to grasp other subject areas.*
- *There should be more emphasis on integrating literacy skills in the other subject areas. Other subject areas can be accommodated through topics.*

Overall, it appears that staff supported the emphasis of the program and believed that the program was meeting its objectives. They expressed doubt that many of the students would be able to integrate into regular programs successfully after two years because of the students' extreme learning delays and difficulties. Two apparent staff issues were those of behavior and parental support. It appears that although the eligibility criteria excluded students with severe behavior disorders, a number of students admitted to the program demonstrated unacceptable behaviors or poor attendance. Staff reported that parent support was lacking for some students.

Student Response

The Basic Literacy students were required to complete a simple open-ended survey. The response rate was 98%, with 116 surveys being completed. The responses were provided to the researcher by the school district. Themes were identified by the frequency with which they were mentioned. Where possible, general comments were also quantified through a tally. Responses from elementary and junior high students were very similar. A summary of the student survey responses is presented below.

Open-Ended Questions and Responses as Cited on Student Survey (1998)

What are the good things about your school?

- *The most common theme was how great the teachers in the program were and that there was more support than the students were used to, which was considered a very positive feature. Comments included, "You don't have to wait for help," "My teacher has taught lots and knows all the different levels," "I learn things that I missed," "I learn faster," "I get the help I need," "With more help, I make fewer mistakes; even if I make mistakes teachers encourage me rather than make fun of me."*
- *Twenty percent of the students commented on the smaller, quieter classes, which made it easier for them to learn.*
- *Seventy percent of the students indicated that the program made them feel much better about themselves and their ability to learn. Comments included, "You learn and you get smarter," "It helps me work better," "I am learning lots of new things," "It's helping me to control my temper," "I'm getting better at all subjects," "I am more confident in myself and my work," "I have friends," "Everything about the program is good," and "I feel good."*

- *Ninety five of the students mentioned specific areas where they felt the program was doing some good by helping them to improve in such things as reading, writing, spelling, working on their own, using strategies to learn.*
- *Various program features mentioned as being good included computers, field trips, math, good books, reading buddies, reading to younger kids, and having mentors.*

What would make your school program better for you?

- *A summary of the majority of responses (as identified by the researcher) here would be "MORE—more of the many good things listed under question one—more teachers, new books, reading, writing, work, help, supplies, computers, mentors.*
- *Other areas for improvement listed usually by single students only included being closer to home, a bigger classroom, more sports, more options, more free time, and going on field trips.*

How are you being helped with your learning difficulties?

- *Sixty-eight percent of the students felt that they were helped by being part of a smaller group of students and by having lots of teachers and adult helpers willing and available to work with them with patience.*
- *Students felt that being required to do lots of the following helped them: reading, reading to the class, and home reading; math and math drills; homework; spelling tests, story writing, listening; playing games in math, language arts, and social studies; and generally working on their weak points.*
- *Thirty one percent of the students mentioned being helped by teachers giving them clues to help them solve their problems and teaching them learning strategies including sentence starters, spelling words out loud, and the vowel circle,*

- *Some students felt that using computers, others by using manipulatives or by using their agendas every day, helped them.*
- *Individual student comments included, "I am helped by being able to work at my own level," "Teachers make learning fun," and "by knowing that they won't make fun of me when I make a mistake."*

Overall, the aspects that students liked most about the Basic Literacy program were the excellent teachers, the smaller, quieter classes, and the fact that the programs made them feel better about themselves and their ability to learn. When asked what they would like to change about the Basic Literacy program, students usually had no response.

In sum, at the end of the first year of the Basic Literacy program the stakeholders generally reported the program to be successful. The parent and student surveys appear to have been more generic in nature than the staff surveys. The staff surveys and responses were more constructive and critical with regard to learning and implementation issues. The most apparent concern identified by the staff was the measuring and reporting of student growth (achievement) in the Basic Literacy program. Class size was also deemed to be an essential component of the program. Based on the survey responses, the school district continued into the second year of the Basic Literacy program. No modifications were made between the first and second year of the program.

1999 Attitudinal Report

At the end of the two-year pilot Basic Literacy program, parents and staff were again surveyed by the school district to determine stakeholder satisfaction with the program. The Basic Literacy students were not surveyed at that time. In June 1999 the school district administered the district's standard survey tool to a random sample of all parents in the school district. The Basic Literacy responses were pulled from the general census; thus the parent responses were not as in-depth as those in the survey administered in 1998. It appears that the school district was satisfied with the results of the first-year Basic Literacy surveys and thus did not feel that a second-year survey warranted as much administrative time and attention. The following information is extrapolated from a school board report dated December 13, 2000.

Parent Satisfaction

The school district parent satisfaction survey administered in 1999 included parents of children who were in the Basic Literacy program. However, the questions were more generic in nature than those in the previous survey, which targeted outcomes specific to the Basic Literacy program. Sixty-two percent of the Basic Literacy parents responded to the survey. Overall, the parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the program. Further, parents expressed pleasure with the positive messages that they were receiving about their children. This information is presented in Table 7.

Staff Satisfaction

The Basic Literacy teachers identified both the strengths and areas of concern within the Basic Literacy program. Themes were identified in the school district data through the frequency with which they were mentioned. It appears overall that the successes experienced by individual students in becoming successful learners and making contributions to the school community were the largest benefit of working in the Basic Literacy program.

Common themes in the highlights mentioned were:

- *Most students made substantial academic gains.*
- *As students found success in school, there was considerable growth in self-esteem.*
- *Parents expressed pleasure with the program and with the positive messages they were receiving about their children.*

Table 7

1999 Survey of Literacy Parents (N=74)

	Percentage of parents who were satisfied	
Questions	Elementary school N=48	Junior high school N=26
How satisfied are you:		
With the information you receive about program/courses available	98	81
With the programs/courses available in your child's school	96	76
That your child receives the help needed to succeed in school	93	81
That your child receives the services he/she needs	92	80
That your child finds their school work challenging enough	98	80
With the emphasis placed on reading at your child's school	96	81
With the emphasis placed on writing at your child's school	94	82
With the emphasis placed on mathematics at your child's school	91	85
With the emphasis placed on science at your child's school	91	77
With the emphasis placed on social studies at your child's school	94	89
With the way computer technology is used in your child's school	87	76
Receive enough information about what children are expected to learn	87	73
Enough information about how children are expected to behave	96	93
You receive enough information about how your child is progressing	89	77
The usefulness of the information you receive in the progress report	89	89
With the way students are grouped into classes in your child's school	85	
With your opportunity for involvement in the school decisions	94	84
With your opportunity for involvement in the school budget process	83	91
With your opportunity for involvement in the school's parent group	100	86
With your opportunity for involvement in the school activities	95	100
That your child is safe in the school	94	84
With the way discipline is handled in your child's classroom	89	88
With the way that discipline is handled in the school	87	88
Your child's school is preparing your child to be a responsible citizen	100	93
With the emphasis your school places on student attendance	100	92
The teacher uses teaching methods which meet the needs of your child	95	88
That your child's teacher(s) cares about him/her	96	96
That your child's teacher(s) treats all students fairly	92	92
With your child's teacher (s)	98	96
With the non-teaching staff at your child's school	100	91
With the school principal	96	92
With your child's school	100	92
With the welcome you receive at your child's school	100	100
With the overall quality of education that your child is receiving	96	81

When asked about the strengths of the literacy program, staff most frequently mentioned:

- *Significant improvement in student achievement and self-esteem.*
- *Programming flexibility.*
- *Smaller instructional groups.*
- *Availability of teacher aides.*
- *Skilled, knowledgeable staff.*
- *Administrative support at the school.*

Issues most frequently identified by staff included:

- *The desire for common assessment instruments.*
- *Common thematic units of study and supporting resources designed for the program.*
- *Some students have poor attendance or do not complete homework assignments and their parents do not support the school in addressing these problems.*
- *Desire for more contact with program staff in other schools through meetings, visits to other classes or an organized support network.*
- *Belief that the program should start prior to Grade 4, so that the academic gap is smaller.*
- *Some classes are too large for effective individualization.*
- *Some students continue to present behavior problems, even through the criteria attempt to screen out those students who are aggressive.*

In sum, the attitudinal survey results collected by the school district enhanced the holistic study of the Basic Literacy program by providing student and parent perceptions of the program. Although the format of the school district survey did not remain consistent from year to year and the response rate was low, the tool was sufficient for the results to be considered reliable and valid. Though limited, the feedback indicated that stakeholders were generally satisfied with the Basic Literacy program. It further appears that the evolving and reciprocal relationship between the home and school was a central tenet.

The parents acknowledged and were grateful that their children were receiving the extra help they needed. The Basic Literacy staff, in turn, recognized and appreciated the crucial support of the home and cited this as one of the biggest contributors to success. The surveys further appeared to indicate that the Basic Literacy program was beneficial for the students who cited that they were more successful once they had the individual attention of the teacher. The Basic Literacy program seemed to initiate a cyclical effect of improved self-esteem for the students that, in turn, improved their school achievement. Although the survey results were positive in nature, the feedback was limited. In-depth investigation and interviews with Basic Literacy teachers was warranted.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative investigation into the Basic Literacy program was conducted for several purposes: to identify the teaching strategies employed in the Basic Literacy classroom, to identify whether or not common strategies employed across Basic Literacy sites were representative of successful literacy practices, to identify any site (school) or school district variables that may have affected instruction in the Basic Literacy program, and to identify overall satisfaction with the Basic Literacy program. This investigation occurred through open-ended and in-depth interviews with three of the Basic Literacy teachers.

Identification of Themes

The identification of themes was completed through the critical incident technique. The data from each of the Basic Literacy teacher interviews were compiled and reviewed, and teacher comments were tallied based on their nature and/or frequency.

As a result, common themes were extrapolated from the data. The themes that emerged are presented under three headings: (a) teaching practices in Basic Literacy instruction, (b) setting the stage for effective Basic Literacy instruction, and (c) the administrative milieu of Basic Literacy instruction. During a group dialogue each Basic Literacy teacher confirmed the accuracy of the data collection, interpretation, and themes identified.

Teaching Practices in Literacy Instruction

Identification of teaching practices within the Basic Literacy classroom served a dual purpose: to search for commonalities in strategies across Basic Literacy sites and to investigate whether the common strategies were indicative of successful literacy practices. For the purpose of the investigation, the eight conditions of literacy learning proposed by Cambourne (2001) were used as a framework for identifying successful literacy practices. The following data are extrapolated from the interviews conducted with the following three Basic Literacy teachers: Sally at Sunnybrook Elementary School, Ann at Oakville Elementary School, and Judy at Hillside Junior High School. The results and data interpretation are integrated for presentation.

Diversity of Strategies

An eclectic approach to teaching was cited by the teachers as best suited for the students in the Basic Literacy program. The teachers centered their dialogue mostly on the instructional strategies of reading rather than writing. The reason for this appeared to be the Basic Literacy students' writing skills were minimal or non-existent. It was hoped that as reading comprehension improved, that writing skills would be elevated. Therefore, the Basic Literacy teachers emphasized reading strategies. Two of the teachers discussed a variety of reading strategies they had applied in order to provide a comprehensive Basic Literacy program. Ann, at Oakville School, summed up this notion: "We are always doing phonemic awareness, we read together, we do comprehension skills, we ask questions, and we do a lot of thinking about our language experiences, so I consider it to be a total language approach." Sally, at Sunnybrook School, recognized that "because the learning needs of my students are so diverse, it is essential that I provide a diverse reading program."

It was the diversity of reading strategies employed that suggested multiple opportunities for learner-readers (what Cambourne, 2001, termed *use*) existed in the Basic Literacy classroom. This was especially evident in Ann's classroom, where reading the local newspaper was a daily event. During an observation visit, one Basic Literacy student was overhead talking to another student, "We need to read the weather report so that we can graph the temperature today." "I heard on the radio it was going to be 17C, so let's put that." "No, we should check the *Journal* and see what they think the temperature is going to be." Utilization of the newspaper was applied as a reading activity, which became an opportunity for authentic student reading.

When students are involved in literacy tasks and activities that are purposeful and authentic, they are more motivated to learn and come to view reading and writing as relevant and dynamic (Verhoeven & Snow, 2001). This was further evident in Sally's Basic Literacy classroom, where she constantly stopped instruction or changed focus when she saw a teachable moment:

> I think we are very good with teachable moments. For example, we always devote a portion of our day to current events. The students read in the paper there was a federal election occurring, so we decided to hold an election right here in our own classroom.

The current events activity spawned several literacy learning moments and appeared to be a timely integration of social studies topics and literacy learning.

During a classroom election, instruction in skills and strategies (such as decoding and comprehension, spelling, punctuation, and grammar) was most effectively addressed in the context of each student's own personal need for meaning making. The Basic

Literacy students in Sally's classroom were required to develop a platform of issues, write campaign speeches, and address their peers.

> The discussion that occurred when children developed their political platform was interesting and lively. This also allowed me to assist the students with their writing skills, but more importantly, to illustrate how the power of language could influence the voting process . . . . The connection for the students became much more explicit.

Based on such comments, it appears that language learning in the elementary Basic Literacy classrooms was considered a natural construction of new, richer, connected meanings from the students' previous understandings.

Sally asserted that she knew from the beginning of the program that she wanted to

> try and guard against teaching reading as a series of skills or components to be taught in a prescribed, fashion. . . . I always try to be very aware of the important contribution that each component plays in the literacy development of my students.

At the junior high school level, Judy commented that she relied on the work she had done the previous year as an intern teacher: "I modeled my program here after that [last year's program] because it was very successful. . . . The teacher I worked with was extremely knowledgeable, and so that is where I learned everything I know about literacy." Judy further noted that the strategies that she employed were usually based on literature:

> Pretty much throughout the year I place the students into high, medium, and low. . . . They read a text, and within that group they rely on each other with the reading. I usually have prereading vocabulary and then some comprehension questions, and they read the chapter out loud together.

Based on the teachers' comments, it appears that the literacy conditions of *use* and *immersion* as defined by Cambourne (2001) were being met. Students were provided multiple opportunities for language experience in a meaningful manner. These conditions appear to have been more explicit in the elementary schools; evidence of an appreciation and understanding at the junior high school level was provided during the final dialogue with the teachers. Judy indicated, "I appreciate and strive to provide as many language experiences as possible. I just try to be a little more subtle with the junior high students." It was evident to any observer walking into the Basic Literacy classrooms or through conversations with the teachers that the central tenet of this program was to read whatever, wherever, and whenever the participants desired.

Diversity in teaching strategies is commensurate with the research findings (Perfetti, 1995), which suggests that to teach children, unique approaches must be utilized for each individual, and general goals of reading education should be met in a wide variety of ways rather than through one particular method of teaching. It appears that diverse teaching strategies, as a tool and a method, assisted the Basic Literacy teachers in providing an individualized program for each student. Sally summed it up best:

> I think what we can't measure is getting each child to feel comfortable in literacy and being able to enjoy a book, so I will use whatever [strategy] it takes so that my students are not afraid to take a risk with language.

Instructional Strategies in Reading

Employing any one strategy that has proved to be effective for improving a particular aspect of literacy learning will be futile if instruction is not adapted to fit the strengths and needs of a particular group of learners, if classroom management is an issue, or if a 'risk-taking' environment has not been fostered (Cunningham, 1999). Ann clearly identified this notion: "I work with children who come to school with unique personalities; therefore, I need to respect the fact that each child may respond differently to the content and the manner in which I am teaching." The most common instructional strategies employed were paired reading, guided reading, and novel studies. It was noted that the implementation of these strategies varied in each classroom based on the tailoring of instruction.

Paired reading provides an opportunity for children to read one-on-one with an adult. Each teacher varied with regard to the frequency and purpose of the paired reading experience. Judy, at Hillside Junior High school, stated:

> I do whatever I can to make reading an enjoyable experience. For these students independent reading is drudgery; thus they need to feel that they are not alone when they read. I believe paired reading is a great way to support the students in their reading, but it also allows me to build a relationship with the individual student.

When asked how it assisted with building a relationship, Judy responded "By allowing me the time (three times a week) to have a shared language experience with the student, . . . even though they are teenagers, they still really want to feel independent and supported at the same time."

As a strategy, paired reading allows the child and adult to read a text together. Once a child feels confident to continue the reading on his/her own, the child taps his/her finger to inform the adult. If the child begins to struggle with a word (*approximation*, as defined by Cambourne, 2001), the adult corrects the miscue, and the two of them begin reading together until the child once again taps a finger. The adult is provided with insights into the reading processes, and knowledge and understanding of individual students. Further, the teacher is required to model the reading process alongside the student, which is an indicator of the literacy condition of *demonstration*.

Ann commented that at Oakville Elementary School she teaches the Basic Literacy parents how to utilize the paired reading technique. "After the parents try this at home, they often tell me that this technique alleviated some of their frustration in trying to help their child read." Sally asserted, "Paired reading is an excellent strategy as it demonstrates that language and reading are a social act by nature." Judy further encouraged the junior high Basic Literacy students to utilize this technique when partner-reading with their peers. "In fact, I will often pair up students for this specific purpose."

It was evident throughout the numerous discussions on the paired reading strategy that the Basic Literacy teachers believed that social collaboration enhances learning. Readers and writers develop meaning as a result of co-constructed understandings within particular contexts (Bromley, 1999). This suggests that text interpretation and level of participation are influenced by the size and social makeup of the group, the cultural conventions of literacy, and the different perspectives that others convey. Judy reflected on one student in particular:

> I had one student in the class that came back from Mexico, so he knows all about pesos and he knows all about bartering. The other students didn't know what a peso is, that it was a type of money, so I had him work with a small group of his peers to *teach* them. I told the student to locate books on Mexico and then pair-read the material with a peer.

The evidence of paired reading appears to be a form of student-directed learning at the junior high level that offers the independence that many young adults desire.

The common strategy of paired reading provided one indication the literacy conditions of *demonstration* and *approximation* may have underpinned the Basic Literacy classroom. The Basic Literacy teachers were modeling the reading process through their work alongside the children, illustrating that reading mistakes help us to adjust our knowledge. Guided reading, another strategy identified by the Basic Literacy teachers, is similar to the paired reading process; however, it enhances and combines reading with direct teaching.

Fountas and Pinnell (1999) asserted that the ultimate goal in guided reading is to help children learn how to use independent reading strategies successfully. Sally noted that she often worked with a small group of children who used similar reading processes and were able to read similar levels of text with support. Once they had read the text, one or two teaching points were selected to present to the group following the reading, and then the children were required to take part in an extension activity based on their reading:

> For example, I will often go back to the reading and ask the children for evidence of a problem within the story, or if I notice that several students are struggling with compound words, we will utilize that moment to teach the basics of compound words.

Judy noted, "The guided reading process really helps me in planning my lessons as I can break the students into smaller groups." All three teachers said the guided reading strategy requires the reading groups to be fluid throughout the school year. However, Judy said that she changed her reading groups only three times. The reading groups were mainly homogenous "because it takes a long time to work through a novel study at the junior high level, and I find it easier to have the groups at the same level."

In contrast, Ann's and Sally's (elementary teachers) groupings were continually changing. Sally noted, "I like to shake things up. . . . I believe that children learn by helping others and by recognizing we each have different strengths and weaknesses." It was evident that *expectations* of being a reader were established in the Basic Literacy classrooms; however, this appeared to be more explicit in the elementary classrooms. The children operated in a fashion that suggested that they indeed wanted to become readers. During a participant-observation session, it was noted that when a student was losing motivation in reading a text, Sally reminded the student ,"You are in my class to learn to be a reader. You cannot do that if you do not try. . . . Now give it a go. . . . I am sure you can do it." It appeared to the researcher this was somewhat more difficult to achieve in the junior high setting based on the teacher expectations and maturity level of the students.

Ann described how she views the guided reading process:

> What I endeavor to do is, I try to model through the guided reading. . . . I try to model what good readers do. In the guided reading I also focus on things, like what to do when you come to a word you don't know. I ask the students, "What are some of the strategies that we can use?" And very often when I am listening to those kids read initially, they will make a substitution based on the first couple of letters, and sometimes it is meaning and sometimes it does not make sense. So I can tell they are not monitoring their reading, so I look at decoding skills. *[response]* What we do when we come to a word that we don't know, . . . so we will make little windows and try to find 'pieces' of the word, or we can look at context.

Ann concluded by reflecting, “At the end of the year I ask the kids, ‘What is it that I’ve done that has helped you to become a better reader?’ I need to know, and I talk to the kids about the fact that I am learning all the time” (*demonstration)*. According to Ann’s students, the guided reading process provides them with “time to figure out the word.”

The Basic Literacy teachers utilized either leveled books or novel studies for guided reading. The purpose of matching books to readers was to provide reading opportunities that would help children develop an effective reading process. Sally commented, “If I am serious about improving literacy achievement for my students, I must be certain that my classroom materials offer the richest books possible.” As a participant-observer, the researcher noted that Sally had three types of books in the classroom, including books to expand children’s literary experiences, books to support research and inquiry, and leveled books to support children’s reading development.

The manner in which guided reading materials were available and utilized provided a further example of what Cambourne (2001) termed *demonstration*. The Basic Literacy teachers were very cognizant of the need to have a variety of literature available. The guided reading material was clearly displayed in all of the classrooms, and it appeared that the students felt comfortable using this material. By exposing the students to a plethora of literature, it appeared that the Basic Literacy teachers were demonstrating an understanding that prior knowledge guides learning.

The best predictor of what students will learn is what they already know (Pressley, 1999). Prior knowledge is the foundation upon which new meaning is built. As Sally observed:

> When I look at why is it that some children don’t read right away, . . . I guess I think it is because of the basics in early childhood education and considering their background knowledge. You look at many of these literacy children, and they don’t have a foundation. As a result, when they come to read (with minimal background knowledge), we find we are required to spend a lot of our time on classroom discussions. We bring a lot of books from the public library. . . . We probably have one hundred extra books for discussion purposes.

It became evident to the researcher that these books were utilized as means to enhance and increase the students' experiences with language. Ann furthered this notion by stating:

> These students do not have a clue what they are reading. We were reading a passage with the statement . . . "*There was a faint sound in the background.*" We had to put the ghetto blaster on loud and then turned it down so that it would become faint. This assisted the children in understanding how the word *faint* became background music.

Ann continued:

> These kids need their past experiences to draw upon, and a lot of them certainly watch television, and television isn't interactive. They have not had a chance to build language orally, which is such a strong component of successful readers.

The interactions that occurred in the Basic Literacy classroom between teacher and student during the guided reading process are evidence of *response*, as well as Vygotsky's (1978) notion of "zone of proximal development," wherein teachers interact with children to understand them better and to teach new ideas at an appropriate level of challenge. According to the Basic Literacy teachers, building on a child's background experiences (in the first year of the Basic Literacy program) appears to be correlated with the improvement of reading achievement in the second year of the program. Further, advocating that the Basic Literacy program begin at a younger age (which all three teachers did) implies that a child's prior knowledge base is believed to be a central tenet in the academic success of the Basic Literacy students.

A significant difference between the elementary and junior high Basic Literacy guided reading programs appears to be the availability of reading material. As noted by Judy:

> It is much more difficult to compile literature/texts that interest and motivate the junior high students and yet are at an instructional level that would guarantee them success rather than frustration. They don't buy into the Amelia Bedelia books; they are not going to read it. They need something they can relate to so that they can read. . . . That, to me, is the biggest hurdle.

The identification of this gap between available resources and the student's abilities appeared to demonstrate Judy's desire and belief that learning must be meaningful for her students. Even though the elementary classrooms employed more leveled books, all three teachers claimed that novel studies are a consistent motivator because they provide the children with the impression of completing higher-level work.

In a recent University of Alberta study, Finlaison (1999) examined the specific teaching strategies employed by the junior high Basic Literacy teachers. Several junior high Basic Literacy teachers asserted that common thematic units of study and supporting resources designed for the Basic Literacy program are required. Often, the thematic units of study referred to were 'novel studies' at both the elementary and secondary level. Finlaison asserted that novel studies are useful in the Basic Literacy classroom because the guided reading of novels provides opportunity for a variety of activities, including vocabulary, cloze activities, plotting, and oral or written reports. Finlaison's final assertion is of note: The teaching strategies and resources found to be effective in junior high basic literacy programs are not unique; they are, however, rarely found in a junior high school environment. Finlaison's findings complement the research reported here by confirming that successful literacy practices should be global enough to transcend both age and grade level.

The use of novel studies allows Basic Literacy students to consider the relationship between events and character and to describe or depict setting, theme, and mood. They promote discussions that allow students to draw parallels with their own experiences. At the elementary level, Sally stated:

> At the start [of the year], I began with a novel study, and we worked through it and looked at the events and transferred some of those strategies to our writing. But with these kids they did not know how to listen to a chapter book, and I think they were so angry with some of the changes [of being in a Basic Literacy classroom] that I reverted back to reading picture books and talking about illustrations.

Sally continued:

> Later in the year and [certainly] in the second year, we were able to move into the novel studies and started looking at some of the underlying issues. For example, [referred to *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli], of racism or people that are illiterate as adults, or homelessness.

At the junior high level, Judy utilized the novel studies as a form of repetition:

> In language arts we use repetition a lot, . . . just seeing a word, knowing what it means, seeing it again in context, understanding what it means, and making sense of it and remembering it. That's where I get the vocabulary words, and we sit down in a novel study group, and I pull out all of the difficult words that I think they will have in a chapter. We read them out together, and we look at the meanings, and we discuss the meanings and if anyone had any knowledge about one of the words.

Other strategies occasionally mentioned in the teachers' repertoire of instructional activities included mnemonics, oral instructions, sustained silent reading, choral reading, and read-alouds. The Basic Literacy teachers indicated that these were not commonly utilized across the Basic Literacy classrooms. Throughout the paired reading, guided reading, and novel studies, several of Cambourne's (2001) eight conditions of literacy learning were evident. The researcher discovered that *immersion*, *demonstration*, *responsibility*, *approximation*, *use*, and *response* were prominent within all three of the Basic Literacy classrooms. Therefore, this investigation suggests that the Basic Literacy teachers chose reading strategies that were based on successful literacy learning practices.

Instructional Strategies in Writing

Discussions of the writing strategies employed in the Basic Literacy classroom suggested that the teachers facilitated the writing process through the gradual release of responsibility and scaffolded instruction. This could be described as a process in which students gradually assume a greater degree of responsibility for a particular aspect of learning. Graham and Harris (1996) confirmed that the gradual release of responsibility and scaffolded instruction is consistent with the constructivist principle of meaningful, authentic contexts, or *use*, as defined by Cambourne (2001). Sally highlighted a case study of one of her students:

> With this particular child, if you look at his first practice HLAT, he didn't write one word. Wouldn't write. When I look at his third year again, there is a big difference. I used to have to write the first words for him. I would just say, "How can I help you?" I would write it down, and then he would finish it. By the third year he was a self-starter.

It was this use of sentence starters in the Basic Literacy classroom that provided the students with a "safety net" during their writing activities.

Sally and Ann both emphasized graphic organizers and sentence starters as a central strategy in their writing programs. Ann explained that

> in the first year, I had pencils flying. . . . I had kids who would not write because they never felt they had success in their writing, so we said, "Here are some sentence starters. . . . I want you to think about that book. What are some of the sentences that we could use?" So for example, I would write on the board "I like," "I didn't like." We talked about using the word *because* to support their opinions and to build fluency in their writing. We talked about the character that was most like them. And while they recognized similarities, they still had a hard time getting started. Sentence starters were my best success that first year, and we used it in every kind of journaling, whether it was math or science or language arts. Following sentence starters, I usually move into where they [students] will start to do a lot more of their own writing. And the one weakness I feel the kids have generally is in planning their writing. They don't know how to plan, and that is where I find graphic organizers to be beneficial.

All three of the Basic Literacy teachers provided many opportunities to write for a variety of purposes. This included letter writing, campaign writing, narrative writing, and persuasive writing. However, the most common writing activity across Basic Literacy sites appeared to be the use of reading response journals. The purpose of these journals was for students to reflect and write about their reading. Sally commented:

> When I look at their reading response journals, I get insight into whether the students comprehended the text material. It also allows me the chance to examine their writing within a context that was not artificial, like the picture prompts of the HLAT writing.

The response journal activity was often established around centers. Sally would "have the kids look at quotation marks within the reading and writing responses. I would also have a center established where one group of students is publishing some of the writing that we has previously edited." During one participant observation when the students were studying Canada in social studies, they wrote reports and sent business letters to each province and territory (*use*).

Judy noted that at the junior high level:

> Correcting is a big thing, I believe that the students also learn from correcting things, and nothing is finished until it is one hundred percent. And if they have to come back two or three times, I am going to make them do it until it is right and it is done correctly. You know, emphasis on their writing, especially with editing. We go up to the computer lab where they are writing. All of their assignments are done on the computer lab, and I will sit with each one of them, try to individually, and help them edit. So just going over their writing and correcting and editing and fixing and polishing things up.

Use and *demonstration* were evident throughout the writing strategies employed. The link between reading and writing was fostered through the use of reading response journals. It was an authentic activity that the Basic literacy teachers believed incorporated higher level thinking skills. The students were required to 'think' and 'reflect' about language. The teacher who provided various sentence starters was modeling how to put thoughts/ideas into a written text. Further, the students' writing appeared to be prominently displayed in the elementary classrooms and was utilized as a form of *immersion* in wall print. During participant-observation sessions, both teachers referred to evidence of successful student writing that was posted around the classrooms.

Instructional Strategies in Spelling

To enhance spelling patterns, phonemic awareness, and 'word family' instruction Cunningham and Hall's (1994) balanced literacy approach was employed by all three Basic Literacy teachers. *Making words* is an activity in which children are individually given some letters and use these letters to make words. Cunningham asserted that making words is a multilevel developmental activity because within one instructional format there are endless possibilities for discovering how our alphabetic system works. Ann explained what she considered to be the benefits of making words:

> I have observed children who lack phonemic awareness appear to develop that awareness as they listen for the sounds in words in order to make them, . . . while other students who have phonemic awareness appear to learn letter-sound correspondences and spelling patterns.

Sally utilized assorted letters:

> What the children do is, they manipulate the letters to see if they can come up with words, and this is really successful because this is where I feel I can look at some of their phonemic awareness skills. I also always utilize the FM system in the classroom during spelling, and I know the FM system has really helped with activities like this as it helped the kids to hear the sounds and words. You know, beginning, middle and end—looking at some common generalizations that they can transfer into their writing.

Judy said that for her spelling program she completed 'funtastic' spelling by

> looking at words that had something common about them, whether they had a long *o* sound or a long *a* sound in it, and they found words that had this particular similarity between all of the words. Then we worked throughout the week on activities with that word or those groups of words. It could be a lot of things from just writing them [the spelling words] in sentences to filling blanks. I would put some letters on the board, and they would have to figure out what word it spelled, or unscrambling. This was based on the Cunningham activity where a word is matched into a box. The taller letters had a tall box, and the lower case letters had a small box.

It appears that the employment of Cunningham's (1999) 'making words' activity is aligned with Cambourne's (2001) notion of *approximation*. However, it was noted that the most efficacious manner in which to teach spelling may have been to combine *approximations* with *use*. Evidence of this combination was provided in one of the elementary Basic Literacy classrooms. Spelling approximation was considered in light of the students' daily writing, with an emphasis on transference.

Motivational Strategies

Most teachers are aware of the link between the teaching-learning activity that they employ and the learning they want to achieve. If students cannot or do not engage deeply with these activities, teachers intuitively know that very little learning will occur. As a consequence, teachers are continually on the lookout for teaching-learning activities that work. During research conducted between 1995 and 2001, Cambourne (2001) came to recognize the importance of *engagement,* which ultimately led to the assertion that it was an essential condition of literacy learning practices:

> My research has suggested that engagement was key. It did not matter how much immersion in text and language we provided; it didn't matter how riveting, compelling, exciting or motivating our demonstrations were; if students didn't engage with language, no learning could occur. (p. 86)

The use of goal setting was identified as a motivational strategy employed by all Basic Literacy teachers. Ann maintained that "goal setting is a strategy that is very effective with these children, and they [students] need to foresee that the ownership of learning is given to them." Goal setting strives to encourage students to achieve intrinsic self-worth and motivation. Sally asserted:

> If they want to get better, if they have that within them, if they have a goal they want to achieve, they are going to do better. I can give them the tools, and I keep telling them all the time, . . . this is what you need to do, but you are the one that has to use them and apply them. I try as much as I can to be really motivating, exciting about what we are learning, but it has to come from them as well.
>
> Judy employed goal setting as a means to provide individualized instruction:
>
> I state that at the beginning of the year Johnny's work may be better than Annie's work, but we are going to adjust for them individually. I won't assign as much to some students as I will to others. If I know that this student can accomplish a little bit but is capable of accomplishing the whole page, I will set that as a goal for them.

It appears that most often the elementary Basic Literacy teachers established goals in consultation with the students, whereas the junior high Basic Literacy teacher established goals based on performance and abilities.

The use of goal setting is commensurate with what Durell (2002) stated is a cognitive perspective of motivation in which there is an emphasis placed on plans, goals, schemas, and expectations, and learners are viewed as active and curious. By recognizing and enhancing student motivation in the first year of the literacy program, the teachers were further contributing to the increased achievement of the students in the second year of the program.

Extrinsic motivations were consistent throughout the Basic Literacy classrooms. In various forms, these included computer time, prizes, or free lunches to motivate the students. Judy noted:

> The students want to go and get that prize at the very end, and so they are really into reading and they are also very competitive. They keep track of it on a chart on the wall, and they go up and check each other's to see who is in the lead and who is winning, so that is a motivating factor for some of them.

These motivators were employed to foster teamwork, an increase in home-reading time, and responsibility in bringing books back to the classroom.

Paris, Lipson, and Wixson (1983) asserted that motivation often makes the difference between learning that is superficial and shallow and learning that is deep and internalized. Students need both the skill and the will to become competent and motivated readers. Recently, Miserandindo (1996) claimed:

> By third and fourth grade children have formed ideas about their own competence and these ideas are already influencing their engagement in school activities. We can speculate that these children form these self-impressions by comparing themselves to their peers and their teachers' expectations. [More often than not] classrooms and the structure of the school system unnecessarily control and restrict a child. (p. 41)

The Basic Literacy students entered the program no earlier than their fourth year in school, and the evidence garnered from the teacher interviews indicated that positive student motivation was acknowledged and considered to be essential. As discovered by Cambourne (2001) and cited by the Basic Literacy teachers, the effects of *engagement* were far reaching.

Summary

It was emphasized throughout the Basic Literacy teacher interviews that there was no simple, narrow solution to improve literacy competence. However, it appears that there were several common strategies that the Basic Literacy teachers utilized. The three teachers interviewed consistently deemed these strategies to be effective. Of note, they appeared to emphasize reading strategies and put less emphasis on writing. In general, the teacher's comments suggested improved reading skills would assist the writing process rather than the reverse. Further, the teacher's skill level with the instruction and the assessment of writing did not appear to be as sophisticated as with reading.

The commonalities in teaching strategies discovered in the Basic Literacy investigation underscored that a diverse range of strategies were employed and were required to individualize instruction. The most common instructional strategies employed in reading were paired reading, guided reading, and novel studies, and the most common instructional strategies employed in writing were sentence starters and graphic organizers, with reading response journals as a common instrument. Goal setting was commonly utilized as a strategy to motivate the Basic Literacy students.

Through the analysis of instructional strategies, it was apparent that the teachers were cognizant, at varying levels, of successful literacy learning practices. As defined by Cambourne (2001), there was considerable evidence of *immersion*, *demonstration*, *expectations*, *responsibility*, *approximation*, and *use* in the Basic Literacy program. Further, *engagement* underpinned all Basic Literacy instruction and was considered by the teachers to be the biggest hurdle during the first year of the program. The teachers were committed to working with, but provided evidence of wanting to move beyond, extrinsic motivation so that true collaborative and student directed language learning could occur. The teachers considered their role to be one of providing concentrated instructional support in order for the Basic Literacy students to learn the important skills and strategies they had difficulty discovering on their own.

Whether at a conscious or a subconscious level, the interview data suggest that the Basic Literacy teachers were establishing classrooms that provided conditions conducive to literacy learning. Cambourne (2001) postulated six reasons why seemingly normal children fail to learn to read: (a) Students get faulty (or no) demonstrations of how to read or write; (b) students are exposed to highly effective demonstrations, but their engagement with them is at best very shallow; (c) students do not engage because they do not expect to be able to read or write effectively; (d) students get feedback on their underdeveloped attempts to read or write that carries the wrong message; (e) students will not or cannot take any responsibility for their learning; and (f) all of the above. No evidence of this was uncovered in the Basic Literacy instruction; in fact, the Basic Literacy teachers appeared to be actively combating these problems in their respective classrooms.

Further, it should be noted that all of the strategies employed appear to have been generated from the level at which the students read to the teacher and not from the school board's HLAT results. It was not the intention of this research project to quantify growth as a result of these specific strategies, but it appears to the researcher that the strategies employed were a result of informed decision making on behalf of the teachers. Spiegel (1999) asserted that the teacher *is* the necessary foundation for building a successful literacy program. A hiring criterion established by the school board underscored the importance and recognition of effective teaching in the Basic Literacy classroom. The

Basic Literacy teachers were required to have a minimum of five years of teaching experience.

A great deal has been learned about literacy and instruction over the past decades; however, Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) observed that increased understanding of the literacy process appears to have contributed to current debate over classroom practices. Literacy research appears to have moved from performing laboratory-controlled experiments, where one aspect of learning is studied independent of context, to naturalistic classroom settings, where contextual variables, such as affective environment, authenticity of tasks, social interaction, parental involvement, or types of materials, could be observed. Furthermore, our need for higher levels of literacy grows as a result of changes in the demands of the workplace; thus we have redefined what is basic to becoming literate. Simply being able to decode and answer low-level literal questions about a piece of text is no longer sufficient. Being fully literate means being able to use strategies independently to construct meaning from text, draw upon texts to build conceptual understanding, effectively communicate ideas orally and in writing, and possess an intrinsic desire to read and write. The review of the Basic Literacy teaching practices suggests that literacy and instruction have, indeed, become complex, multifaceted tasks.

Setting the Stage for Effective Literacy Instruction

Variables beyond teaching practices in the classroom can also influence the delivery and outcomes of effective literacy instruction. During the interview process the Basic Literacy teachers identified several factors that were beyond their immediate control, but were believed to have had a direct impact on their results. External variables uncovered in the Basic Literacy investigations included curriculum flexibility, class size, and parental support.

Curriculum Flexibility

All three Basic Literacy teachers confirmed that it was essential that the literacy students' school day be filled with language and language activities. The teachers were in agreement that the number of minutes they utilized to instruct language could not be quantified. Ann stated:

> At the onset of the professional development day [with literacy teachers], there were no parameters set. Several of the teachers did ask what percentage of the curriculum—how many minutes—would be donated to language, to math, to social, to science. There was not a definitive answer.

Given permission to relax the required instructional minutes, it appears that the Basic Literacy teachers utilized the curriculum mainly to provide "content" areas of study, but that was a secondary aim/benefit of the program. For example, social studies and science topics such as weather or Canada provide an excellent opportunity to explore the language associated with the topic. The Basic Literacy teachers repeatedly demonstrated and cited classroom examples through language in real-world situations, not contrived curriculum topics.

The flexibility in curriculum implementation also allowed for what Sally termed, "teachable moments: . . . Instruction can be stopped or changed based on apparent weaknesses or connections to a language skill." In Sally's estimation, these opportunities were an essential and crucial component to the success of the Basic Literacy program. As previously noted, Ann required the students at the end of the year to contemplate what she had done as a teacher that contributed to the students' success. They consistently replied that they were "given *time* to figure out the word, read, or to learn what the word means."

Further, Sally asserted that the extra time provided through curriculum flexibility also allowed students to be more honest with themselves and their teacher. "Many students have come up to me and said, 'Pssst! . . . I can't do this!'" The pace of a regular classroom for these students was not conducive, a fact that may have caused Basic Literacy students to further regress in their academic skills during their early years in school. If students did not master a concept quickly, they were often left to their own devices, because new material had to be covered. The magnitude of this is further compounded with the recognition that most current curricula and learning are considered to be spiral in nature. Judy summarized this best: "The regular curriculum simply would not be conducive to me as a teacher in providing the students with a meaningful program."

The Basic Literacy teachers further suggested that the Basic Literacy program was significantly better than using a resource room setting where regular curriculum requirements remained in place. Further, it was believed that the resource room provides a band-aid effect solely, and the transference of remedial skills into the regular curriculum is often not apparent. The Basic Literacy program allows for transference opportunities to occur throughout the day. However, being cognizant of the program goals, the Basic Literacy teachers did attempt to integrate into regular classrooms whenever possible. Ann asserted:

> We are not an island, never have been. Yes, the children have great deficits in their learning, but they also need to establish a commonality with their peers. They need to have a benchmark, a ruler, or whatever you want to call it, so that they can relate. So this is how it should be or this is what I should be doing. Therefore it is not teacher directed; it can become student directed.

Sally said:

> We have tried integration a couple of times, but it was very difficult, and the kids struggled with it. They loved the experiments, and they were usually buddies with someone else. But as the year progressed they just didn't feel as confident about going to another classroom.

It seemed that for the children themselves, although they were motivated to be in the regular classroom, the pace of the curriculum was too difficult.

The researcher noted that not all curriculum objectives and related instructional activities contribute equally to academic development; thus more relevant information could be taught thoroughly in the Basic Literacy program. Some information and ideas are fundamental, and other ideas are simply not essential, especially for diverse learners who face the 'tyranny of time' and must catch up with their peers. The Basic Literacy teachers deemed curriculum flexibility and the opportunities that it provides as essential in the Basic Literacy program. The flexibility, in combination with a small class, proved to be a cogent force.

Class Size

The Basic Literacy teachers deemed the quality of instruction to be directly related to the number of students in each Basic Literacy classroom. Ann noted, "I am positive I accomplish much more [in terms of teaching strategies/learning activities] in this classroom simply because of the number of students." Often, special-needs educational programs deploy funds to hire additional personnel, including language teachers, speech pathologists, psychologists, and social workers. However, the educational funding established for the Basic Literacy classroom was utilized to maintain a capacity of 14 students per classroom. According to the Basic Literacy teachers, the outcome of a small class size was the positive effects of the teacher-pupil relationship, which in turn impacted the quality of instruction and, ultimately, the Basic Literacy students' academic growth.

The debate over the impact of class size continues to be waged in educational communities. Gursky (1998) noted that although quantitative measurements might not always demonstrate improvements based on class size, they are too often narrowly focused on academic testing to prove particularly worthwhile. Gursky further suggested that broadening the measurement criteria to elements other than academic testing would provide a different picture of the impact of smaller classes. In an article in the *Times*

Educational Supplement, Williams (1998) summed up the benefits to teachers from smaller classes:

> Teachers of smaller classes spoke confidently about their teaching, about pupils' progress and about their ability to support those with special needs. . . . Parents also see benefits to smaller classes and are very eager to have their children in smaller classes, believing that disruptions will be minimized and individual attention maximized. (p. 27)

Judy, the junior high Basic Literacy teacher, expressed a similar sentiment:

> I believe much of the growth my students have demonstrated over the past two years is not apparent on a reading test, yet, when I sit beside and work with each student, I can clearly see evidence of their growth.

The opportunity to develop a relationship with each student appeared to enhance individual and meaningful instruction. Sally believed that "the fact that I have 14 students has allowed me to really know my students. This is important, especially when you consider I try to teach based on their [students'] strengths and weaknesses." Ann confirmed that the small class allowed her to be more aware of where the problems [both in behavior and learning] were: "I finally get the chance to provide individual and immediate teaching to these youngsters. . . . I can immediately see when a concept has not been mastered." Sally, who has had multiple teaching experiences, summarized, "I am able to know each child and their learning needs better than I have ever been able to before."

A growing number of academic studies (Word, Achilles, & Bain; 1990, 1997) have now documented the common-sense conclusion that smaller class sizes make for better learning. In a recent paper on class size produced for the Canadian Education Association, Zeigler (1997) asserted that it is the parents who believe that their children would benefit from more individual teacher attention and that this would result in higher scores on achievement tests. Evidence of this belief was provided in the Basic Literacy survey and teacher interview results. Sally commented on what appeared to be the benefits to both parties:

> These students are in a small group of 14 students with a full-time teacher and a program aide. I think that is definitely beneficial. You know, when you talk to parents about where the students have come from, . . . a lot of the children came from classrooms that are over 25 students, and it is hard to reach all children when you have a large class.

The Basic Literacy program attitudinal surveys supported the importance of class size by emphasizing that *time* was one of the most beneficial components of the Basic Literacy program.

As previously noted, in the 1998 parental survey (N=28), 61% of the respondents strongly agreed and 32% of the respondents agreed that their children now received the help that they need. Parental comments included, "The one-on-one teaching is excellent," and "This program takes his individual needs and meets them." Further, it was reported on the 1998 staff survey (N=35) that, when questioned about the importance of class size on the success of the program, 92% of the staff responded '*very important*' and 8% responded '*important*.' Student comments on the same survey stated, "You don't have to wait for help," and "I get the help I need." It appears that the smaller, quieter classes made it easier for students to learn. The results from the 1998 survey were echoed in the 2000 survey results. Basic Literacy staff viewed the smaller instructional groups as a definite strength of the program. Of the parents responding in the second year of the program, 93% were satisfied that their children had received the help they needed to succeed in school.

When queried about the overall effectiveness of the Basic Literacy program, Ann mentioned, "It is not really an improvement. Rather, I just want to reiterate that the number of students is pretty good this year with 15 students, and that it must remain that way." Although, the school district established an expectation that the Basic Literacy classrooms would be capped at 14 students, it appears that this was not always the case when implemented at the school level. Judy asserted that "I have 19 children this year and I find it quite overwhelming. . . . I cannot make the gains that I achieved last year when I had a smaller number of children." Sally was also cognizant that the program guidelines were not consistently adhered to: "Some classrooms did not maintain the 14 student enrollment cap, and those classes were too large for effective individualization."

The research of McRobbie, Finn, and Harman (1998) suggested that only if class sizes (regular student population) are at 17:1 or fewer will the full impact of reduced classes be felt. McRobbie et al. further noted throughout the class size research that, in order to achieve maximum impact, class size reduction should be used in conjunction with other strategies. The benefit to be gained from small class sizes was unlikely to be marked unless teachers changed their style of teaching to exploit the opportunities of smaller groups. Thus, planned reductions in class size should be accompanied by a review of teaching methods, classroom management, and inservicing in order to capitalize on the opportunity to enhance student learning.

Although it is not the intent of this research to delve into the class size debate, the qualitative findings of this study further support the benefits of small class size that were reported in the research literature. It becomes apparent that the combination of a small class and flexibility in curriculum affords the teachers the valuable commodity of time. Further, it was revealed that the Basic Literacy teachers modified their teaching practices to be as individual as the students they taught. When small class sizes are not maintained, instruction is more generic in nature.

Parental Support

Patterns established within the home environment appeared to affect the performance of students in the Basic Literacy classroom. A home environment that reinforces and supports literacy activities, homework completion, and school attendance was cited as positively impacting the program. All three Basic Literacy teachers discussed similar success stories of parental support. Ann noted:

> We have a student this year that has absolutely turned around, and it is a result of parental involvement. The change is absolutely incredible: all her homework done, she comes to school daily, and her absences are gone. With all of these support mechanisms in place, . . . success, . . . a win-win situation.

Historically, studies (Bissex, 1980; Chomsky, 1972; Heath, 1983; Snow, 1983) have described in detail how well-educated parents in mainstream cultures help their young children make the transition to literacy. In modern societies children are exposed in their daily lives to a variety of written messages. According to Mason (1980) and Goodman (1984), educated adults tend to take the time and trouble to interpret these messages, in addition to providing detailed information on the technicalities of encoding and decoding processes, adjusted to children's developmental stage and level of prior knowledge. Thus, children receive continuous, direct aid in inferring and acquiring the graphic code, which represents spoken language. The studies suggested that school-oriented homes also typically provide role models and first-hand experiences that socialize young and even very young children to intensive book usage and to linking book-centered activities with pleasure and enjoyment. However, Sally identified at the onset of the Basic Literacy program that this may not have been the situation for her students: "I was not prepared for how much and for how long these students have hated reading, even before they came to school."

Ann further commented on the lack of background oral language present in many of the Basic Literacy students' homes: "It is clear to me the students have not had the chance to build language orally, prior to school, which I think is such a strong component of successful readers." Ann addressed this issue by "putting on the student's Individualized Program Plans [IPPs] an oral instruction goal as they need oral practice, because depending on just that one part of language abilities, they would not have success in reading." Living in a multicultural society means, among other things, that the language experiences that children have in school may be very different from those that their parents had when they were young. Therefore, expecting parents to provide background knowledge and ongoing help for children's learning may be unrealistic. Even if parents were aware of the school's expectations and were willing to comply, some lacked the language knowledge and other necessary skills in order to undertake tutoring tasks effectively. Sally stated:

> I feel strongly that these parents want their children to succeed but perhaps do not have the patience, skills, or the time to sit down with them. But I do believe that they want their children to be successful. So then I look at what we can do as far as family literacy.

The Basic Literacy teachers attempted to involve the parents as much as possible regardless of their language skill level. Ann noted, "I call the parents all of the time in addition to writing in the student's agenda. I find that personal contact helps the parents understand what is expected." Teaching the parents paired reading techniques was cited as an example of promoting family literacy. However, even if parents were unable to assist their child with reading, monitoring homework appeared to be a viable way of supporting the school. Judy noted that "when the students had homework, you sure could tell who had parents at home that were asking, you know, 'Hey, do you have homework tonight?' because it is always done." Ann affirmed, "Parental support and modeling can often be done by just encouraging the kids to develop responsible skills and take ownership of their learning." School agendas were utilized in all of the Basic Literacy classrooms. Having the parents simply initialize the agenda would identify that they had at least checked the agenda, and this in itself appeared to increase accountability. This suggested that, regardless of skill level, if Basic Literacy parents monitored their child's homework, the chances of success were enhanced.

The Basic Literacy teachers also believed that parental support plays a crucial role in student attendance patterns. Sally observed:

> We struggle a lot with attendance. When we look at the kids who do come daily, you can reach them, especially when a lot of the work that we do is instruction, reading aloud novels, and discussing. When they miss two or three days, or even if it is one day a week, every week, they miss the rhythm or routine of the class. I

> find that it [attendance] is probably my number one concern, whether it is because they don't want to go or they are sick.

However, as Judy added, "Attendance is definitely an issue for 4 or 5 of the students out of the 14; yet as they became motivated, the attendance rates for those 4 or 5 improved." It appeared a child's attendance patterns could be indicative of either parental support (often at the elementary level) or improved self-worth (often at the junior high level). Junior high student comments about increased self-worth were seen in the 2000 survey results and included many statements such as "I have friends," "I feel good," and "I enjoy coming to school now."

Further evidence that the relationship between home and school affects student achievement came from the attitudinal results. Survey results in 1998 indicated that 93% of the parents agreed that they had information provided that would assist them in helping their child at home. One parent even commented that he/she would like to see more homework. Parental support and involvement were also consistently mentioned and appeared to increase as the program progressed. The 2000 attitudinal survey results indicate that 87% (N=48) of the parents responded that they had enough information about what the children were expected to learn and how to help them. The staff were also pleased that parents expressed pleasure with the program and with the positive messages that they were receiving about their children.

The Basic Literacy investigation illustrated the causal connection of the home and school relationship. It appears that if each (home and school) is respectively supported, it positively impacts the Basic Literacy student. The outcome could be observed in the student's self-worth, attendance, and academic achievement. Judy summed up the effects of this relationship best: "I have had students who were just brand new to the program and students who were from an elementary literacy site. If they have the support from home, they are going to succeed, and you are going to see a difference."

Summary

It was emphasized throughout the teacher interview data that there are several external variables that impact the results of the Basic Literacy program. It appears that curriculum flexibility and small class size positively impact the Basic Literacy classroom. The combination of these two proves to be powerful in providing the time required to implement effective and meaningful teaching strategies. The relationship between the Basic Literacy teachers and the parents of the Basic Literacy students, if mutually supportive, have a direct impact on the self-worth and academic accomplishments of the students.

The Administrative Milieu of Basic Literacy Instruction

Throughout the qualitative and quantitative analysis, it became apparent that the administrative milieu directly influences the Basic Literacy program. Administration at both the school district and school site level impacts the development, implementation, delivery, and outcomes of the Basic Literacy program. The Basic Literacy program was conducted in an administrative milieu that was decentralized (commonly referred to as site-based). According to the Basic Literacy teachers, it was generally suggested that tighter management is required by the school district and individual sites to ensure that the Basic Literacy program is consistent at all levels.

Basic Literacy Program Development

Goals, organizational criteria, and student entrance criteria for the Basic Literacy program were established in 1997. According to the Basic Literacy teachers, this was a crucial process that provided a road map for the program; however, central office staff and administrators developed this framework without initial consultation with the teachers. Judy noted that "I liked the idea of knowing what the Basic Literacy program was about when I first started, but I am now not sure if what we were required to do was specific or realistic enough." Evidence of concern with the establishment of the Basic Literacy program was further provided in the interview data.

The initial goal, and a measure of program effectiveness, was that after two years in the Basic Literacy program, students would be integrated back into the regular program. Two of the three teachers interviewed did not have any of their students return to the regular program after two years. Sally stated:

> I try to keep track of my literacy students, and I usually highlight which students I think could possibly look at integration into a regular program. I've only heard of one who has gone back [to the regular program], but the other ones are still in the Basic Literacy program.

Judy stated that she "had not yet seen any student who was integrated back into the regular program at the junior high level." Ann identified one success story:

> We were just talking about a student two years with us, and she went straight back to the regular program. That child took the initiatives from here that we provided her and decided she was going to learn. She is doing very well and is a real success story.

The teacher interview data appear to be congruent with information reported in a school board report (December, 2000), which stated that after three years of the program, only three students had returned to regular programs and were achieving at or close to grade level. According to the board report, 82% of students continued in the Basic Literacy program, 12% of students had other special-needs eligibility, and 2% of students were in regular programs. Although concerns with reintegration were identified, all three teachers felt that partial integration would be more realistic.

At one of the literacy sites, Grade 6 students were integrated into the regular program for science. Sally commented, "Since the students did not feel successful with full integration, we decided we would look at other ways of creative grouping to assist with some integration." This included collaboration between the Basic Literacy teacher and the regular teacher to identify where lessons or partial units would benefit a Basic

Literacy student. At the junior high level, Judy believed that integration occurs more frequently:

> The literacy students are integrated with all grade levels in what we call CARE group or health. We have this CARE group at the end of the day, and we teach the health curriculum, and they are also integrated into physical education.

Increased integration at the junior high level likely assists students in preparing for the realities of high school. However, Ann noted her concerns with regard to this:

> What is going to happen to these kids when they get to high school? I am asking you [as a researcher and as an administrator]. That is the big concern for the program because currently after junior high they are left, they are abandoned. I guess that is the biggest fear: . . . They will just be clumped under special needs [and provided with no assistance].

It became clear from the interviews that although nonacademic integration was more successful, the notion of full academic (core subjects) integration was not feasible and did not occur on a regular basis. Based on this realization, the Basic Literacy teachers were concerned for the long-term future of their students and felt that attention to this was required by the administrative staff in the district.

It was also revealed that an *emphasis on the acquisition of basic concepts and applications rather than higher-level thinking skills* [as cited in the Basic Literacy program goals] was believed to be too narrow and limited in scope. Sally reflected:

> We were told to emphasize the basic concepts of reading; yet I think we all found there was no way to do this meaningfully without incorporating the experiences of the kids, model language, and to help the kids see the way language could be used to benefit them.

As noted in the literature review, Cambourne (2001) identified three definitions of literacy, which include functional literacy, literacy for personal growth and development, and literacy for social equity and social justice. It appears that the administrative committee that established the Basic Literacy program expected a functional literacy approach to instruction in the program, whereas the interview data suggest that the teachers went beyond a functional literacy approach, and at the minimum, literacy for personal growth framed their instructional strategies in the program.

Ann suggested:

> In my mind I knew I wanted my students to leave with skills in reading and writing, but I also wanted them to feel good about themselves and be able to make decisions for themselves. I thought my colleagues had the same view, but I was not sure until the program had been in place for a year.

It was only after the Basic Literacy program had been implemented that the Basic Literacy teachers began to initiate these conversations on their own. It was believed that further insight and understanding of literacy should have been developed and discussed by the administrative milieu before the program was implemented. This sentiment was confirmed in the final group dialogue among the Basic Literacy teachers.

Although the Basic Literacy teachers appear to have had a great deal of influence over their classrooms and students, they did not have initial input into the goals and organizational criteria of the Basic Literacy program. Through their involvement in the program development, it was suggested that the teachers could have established more realistic expectations for their students. However, as the program progressed, the Basic Literacy teachers were able to influence recommendations for the future of their students and define the type of literacy that would be the most beneficial to their students.

Basic Literacy Program Implementation

Stewart (1997) asserted that in a site-based-management organization, curriculum planning must be balanced and correlated with the school district's overall expectations, policies, and standards. This should be a comprehensive process featuring cooperation, coordination, and continuity, and characterized by changes in the procedures through which planning is typically organized and conducted. Within the Basic Literacy program, coordination and continuity of curriculum appeared to be lacking when the program was initially implemented. As Ann stated:

> At the onset of the development day there were no parameters set. It was simply stated: "You are teaching a language-based program." Several teachers did ask what percent of the curriculum, how many minutes would we donate to language, to math, to social, and science. There was not a definitive answer.

Although later cited as a benefit (curriculum flexibility), this caused a lot of uncertainty among the Basic Literacy teachers during the first few months of the program. Commensurate with a site-based philosophy, the Basic Literacy teachers chose what and how to teach. The teachers were making both a political and a social choice; however, they would have appreciated more guidance from the administrators during the early stages of program implementation.

In the 1998 staff surveys it was identified that "a multigrade scope and sequence of skills/knowledge for all subjects was required for the literacy sites." It appears that this lack of curriculum direction provided an opportunity for what Joyce et al. (1999) termed *piecemeal implementation* in a site-based organization. In an attempt to allow those directly affected (Basic Literacy teachers) to be empowered, it is believed that program objectives are often too loosely defined. However, with little direction, each Basic Literacy teacher was required to interpret the program individually, which resulted in unique combinations of expectations, philosophy, and strategies from one classroom to another.

Further, it appears that there was minimal coordination of services between Basic Literacy sites by the school district. This lack of direction was identified in the 2000 staff survey, where a staff member stated, "There was a desire for more contact with program staff in other schools through meetings, visitations to other classes, or an organized support network." Sally commented, "I would just like to make sure there is consistency or at least some communication between literacy sites. That is important, especially between the feeder school and, you know, the higher-level school." Ann asserted that it is essential that we "can get together just for networking opportunities to exchange ideas." To this end, after three years in the program, the Basic Literacy teachers indicated that they had established their own support network to provide consistent implementation as the program continued to evolve.

Basic Literacy Program Delivery

Webster (1995) noted that principals must be experts in a variety of areas when working within a site-based model. The Basic Literacy teachers identified the manner in which principals impact the delivery of the Basic Literacy program. This included a comment by Judy: "It has been my experience that the school administration sometimes uses the Basic Literacy program as a dumping ground for students with other learning needs." Not only were admissions criteria often ignored, but also the class sizes were, at times, increased with the enrollment of other 'coded' students, such as those with mild mental disabilities. As previously noted, Judy "had 19 students in my classroom, and I cannot achieve the same things with that many students." All three Basic Literacy teachers were concerned over maintaining an enrollment ceiling of 14 students.

The responsibility of Basic Literacy program admissions rests with the principal, who is the authority that makes recommendations to other sites and/or approves entrance of students to the program. This approval is, in part, based on a fairly subjective behavioral checklist. The Basic Literacy teacher interview data suggested that several students with 'severe' behaviors were accepted into the program; thus these students were seen to be a hindrance to achieving the program objectives. This was identified as the most difficult aspect of the Basic Literacy program.

Ann commented, "We know these students are frustrated, but some of their behaviors are too demanding." Sally observed that "we really do not know if the behavior is a result of their learning problem. It becomes the chicken-and-egg debate." Ann confirmed that she had "a whole variety of kids this year. I am thinking about one boy who has been diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome and another one who has pervasive developmental disorder." As noted in the interviews, during the four-year span of the program, true 'literacy' students are now more common than they were when the program began; thus the delivery of instruction is more focused. This is largely attributed to administration adhering to the behavioral checklists.

Further, administrators are provided the opportunity to do their own hiring in a site-based organization. It was noted that literacy teachers were required to have a minimum of five years' teaching experience, yet the researcher observed that one of the teachers interviewed had been in the classroom for only two years. This could be indicative of incongruence between administration at the school district level and at the school level. Webster (1995) suggested that principals are required to be competent in measurement and the design of practical evaluations within a site-based organization. The principals are often responsible for evaluating the Basic Literacy program delivery; therefore they need to recognize the administrative milieu that can impact the outcomes of a program.

Basic Literacy Outcomes

Program outcomes are often determined and evaluated based on measures of assessment. A variety of assessment strategies were employed by each of the Basic Literacy teachers interviewed. Classroom assessments were commonly cited as performance-based tasks. Judy commented:

> You always tell them [students] how you are going to assess, especially with a larger project. If you are giving a test, I go over it with them and what my expectations are. . . . So just making sure they understand how they are going to be evaluated is very important at the beginning.

Sally remarked that "I have used everything in the classroom from check lists to rubrics to basic evaluation on unit tests." Ann further stated, "Sometimes, I don't give out marks; for instance, on their journals I just respond with comments back to them." At the junior high level, Judy observed, "Students will occasionally evaluate themselves, which is interesting as I find they are often too hard on themselves."

Standardized assessment tools were utilized to measure academic growth, with results being recorded on the Basic Literacy student's Individual Program Plan (IPP). These measures allowed the Basic Literacy teachers not only to identify academic growth, but also to provide diagnostic information that informs instruction. The most commonly employed assessment tools appeared to be pre- and post-measures, which included Johns Reading Inventory, Alberta Diagnostic Reading Tests, Qualitative Reading Inventories (QRI), Burns and Roe Reading, and the Schonell Spelling Test.

However, the Basic Literacy teachers believed that the standardized assessment tools are too familiar to the Basic Literacy students, that they do not accurately reflect the Basic Literacy students' growth, and that there is no consistency across Basic Literacy sites. Ann stated, "Special-needs students are becoming too familiar with many of the assessment tools" and identified the first concern with the standardized assessment measures. This notion was further supported by Sally, who commented independently:

> I had a student who took one look at the Grade 2 passage and said, 'Do I have to read that story again about the duck with the boots?' They do become too familiar with the passages that have been used before.

Second, the results of standardized assessments do not always accurately reflect the growth that the Basic Literacy teachers observed. Ann commented:

> I have a student in particular that came to me who had no confidence at all in any of her abilities and constantly second-guessed herself. Now that I have had her for the second year, I have seen her blossom into this person who feels that she could tackle anything. You don't see that on paper, and that's unfortunate.

Yet all three Basic Literacy teachers confidently asserted that a significant number of their students had achieved the required minimum of one year's growth regardless of their HLAT or standardized assessment results.

Third, the Basic Literacy teachers recognized that with minimal or no direction from the school district, assessment measurements across Basic Literacy sites are inconsistent. When queried, Ann asserted:

> We thought that we were giving these children a whole variety of tests, and we know that some tests were fair tests and valid tests and others were not; thus the scores were skewed. So we thought that, to be fair to other teachers who may be receiving them at the junior high level, they should know that there is and will be consistency in how their achievement was measured.

When Basic Literacy students moved from one Basic Literacy site to another site, discrepancies appeared in their evaluations. Judy noted the difference on the IPPs:

> It would be very confusing for the parents when they came from an elementary site working at a certain grade level, but my assessments would reveal they were working at a different grade level [often lower] than what was reported at their last school.

The magnitude of inconsistency in measurement was further evident in the administration of the HLAT as uncovered in this research study. In recent years the Basic Literacy teachers have begun to meet on their own to discuss assessment. Through this process they are attempting to search for assessment measures that are common across Basic Literacy sites and accurately depict student growth.

At the outset, certain areas within the Basic Literacy program required directives from central office, which should have provided a "road map" for the development of Basic Literacy sites. This was most evident in the provision of consistent, broad-based assessment measures. Common methods of assessment need to be identified and mandated, according to the Basic Literacy teachers. Expertise in assessment is required to assist Basic Literacy teachers quantify and qualify the growth that their students have demonstrated. Sally commented that measures of literacy should be "considered prior to the onset of the program and cited in the Basic Literacy program objectives so that the outcomes of the program can be valid." Penta and Hudson (2000) supported this type of teacher involvement. They asserted that although it is tempting to apply a top-down model of assessment development, it may be much more effective to develop a model based on information from teachers actually involved in developing and using alternative assessments.

Summary

It appears that the goals and organizational criteria of the Basic Literacy program were loosely defined, which research suggested is typical of a site-based educational organization. However, the Basic Literacy teacher comments identified the broad nature and lack of clarity, the absence of coordination at the district level, and the lack of competence/expertise at the site level as all leading to inconsistencies in the delivery and outcomes of the Basic Literacy program.

No external input or advice was sought in the development of the Basic Literacy program. The school board chose not to involve outside agencies, such as academic institutions, to provide assistance in program design and evaluation. Through the use of expertise in these areas, administrative issues may have been identified at an earlier stage of implementation. During the inception of any educational program, emphasis should be placed on all components of the program. Scriven (1967) suggested that a ‘criterion of merit’ be established at the onset of a program so that all stakeholders can easily make crucial judgments on the development, implementation, delivery, and outcomes of the program. The results of the Basic Literacy investigation appeared to support Scriven’s assertion.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research findings often inform and shape future educational practices. This notion is most apparent in literacy education where reading instruction is implemented based on evolving research. However, Wilkinson (1999) has been critical of unidimensional research on literacy:

> Too often, analyses of complex literacy issues and problems occur within a single discipline. Aspects of a problem that are unfamiliar to members of the discipline are largely ignored, and the resulting analysis is limited in scope and unsatisfactory. (p. 16)

The investigation of the Basic Literacy program was conducted in a multifaceted manner that included multiple perspectives. Instruction in the Basic Literacy program, external variables that impact Basic Literacy instruction, and the administrative milieu of Basic Literacy instruction were examined. The ensuing discussion summarizes the most significant aspects of the investigation, provides conclusions stemming from the investigation, and makes recommendations as a result of the investigation.

Summary of Basic Literacy Findings

The findings of the study are presented as responses to the research questions. The following seven research questions were proposed at the onset of the investigation.

1. **Was there an overall improvement in reading comprehension performance during the first two years of the Basic Literacy program (1997-1999)? Were there differences between the junior high school and elementary school performances?**

The analysis of the HLAT test performance data demonstrated that the HLAT tool did not stand up to statistical rigor; therefore claims of reading improvement could not be proven. However, observations from the analysis suggested that the students in the Basic Literacy program demonstrated overall improvement in reading comprehension between 1997 and 1999. It is believed that this finding is considered noteworthy given that the students' reading improved at a greater pace than their performance prior to admittance to the Basic Literacy program. The reading growth of the elementary Basic Literacy students appeared to be greater than that of their junior high counterparts. This was not surprising given that intervention was provided at an earlier age for the elementary students.

2. **How did the reading comprehension scores of students in the elementary and junior high Basic Literacy program compare with those of schoolmates in the regular elementary and junior high program?**

Although anomalies existed in the data and it was not statistically proven, the elementary Basic Literacy students appear to have exceeded reading growth compared with the regular students. This may have been a result of the junior high literacy students not receiving intervention at an earlier age and the kinds of instructional strategies employed.

Overall, the Basic Literacy teachers indicated that all students made progress in many areas; however, the most noticeable improvement appeared in reading ability. There was a general sentiment among the Basic Literacy teachers that growth in reading and literacy skills in general was more significant than that identified by the test scores. The teachers believed that it was not a question of *whether* the students would improve, but rather *when* they would improve. The Basic Literacy teachers indicated that the academic growth of their students was more evident in the second year of enrollment in the program.

3. Which teaching strategies appeared to be employed in the Basic Literacy classroom?

The study suggested that common instructional practices were apparent across Basic Literacy sites. These practices included paired reading, guided reading, novel studies, the use of sentence starters and graphic organizers, making words, and goal setting. All strategies were employed in a diverse manner that recognized the individuality of each student.

4. Were the teaching strategies employed commensurate with proven successful literacy learning practices?

The commonly employed teaching practices in the Basic Literacy classrooms appeared to meet the requirements of successful literacy practices as identified by Cambourne (2001). It became apparent that the three Basic Literacy teachers in the study were immersing the students in language (*immersion*), demonstrating language use (*demonstration*), expecting students to be readers (*expectations*), encouraging ownership of learning (*responsibility*), utilizing approximations as a teaching tool (*approximation*), and providing multiple opportunities for meaningful learning (*use*).

The notion of *engagement* was supported and deemed to be essential by the Basic Literacy teachers. Without engaging the children in their learning, the conditions of learning literacy would not have proven to be successful. The Basic Literacy teachers employed a variety of motivational strategies such as goal setting and incentives to engage their students. Evidence of *response* was not as apparent as were the other seven conditions of literacy learning. Although the teachers stated that they utilized feedback through reading response journals, peer feedback, and miscues during reading, it was not as easily observed (or discussed) as were the other conditions.

Educators do not know with any degree of certainty why a particular student cannot read. However, there were many successful instructional strategies used in common across the three Basic Literacy classrooms observed. These strategies were listed as component parts of what Cambourne (2001) has described as 'exemplary classroom instruction' in literacy. Thus it appears that, according to the latest scholarship, the Basic Literacy teachers were 'right' in their approach to Basic Literacy instruction.

5. What other site (school) level variables, if any, affected instruction within the Basic Literacy program?

The home-school relationship was an external (school level) variable that influenced the Basic Literacy program. It was found that when there was mutual support between the home and school, the Basic Literacy students benefited. Often the student's language practice increased, homework was completed, and the number of absences decreased as a result of this relationship. The Basic Literacy teachers believed that this had a significant impact on the self-esteem of the students and, when in place, had profound implications for all aspects of the student's academic success.

Further, as a result of site-based decision making, the school had the authority to impact the Basic Literacy program through adherence to enrollment ceilings, behavioral criteria, and employment criteria. The school was directly responsible to maintain the capacity of 14 students established by the school district. In this manner, class size was deemed to be an external variable at both the school and district level. In addition, administrators sending new students to the program had the responsibility of assessing student behavior in an honest and forthright manner. The receiving administrators had the responsibility of ensuring that behavior did not negatively impact the Basic Literacy program. Finally, the administrator at each school was directly responsible for the hiring of the Basic Literacy staff. Administrators were required to ensure that teaching qualifications were aligned with the pre-established criteria, although these criteria were not adhered to at all school sites.

6. What school district level variables, if any, affected the delivery of the Basic Literacy program?

This research study determined that several external factors at the school district level impacted the results obtained in the program. Curriculum flexibility as established by the administrative committee was deemed to be essential in working with students who required extra assistance in their literacy skills. When the quantity of curriculum was relaxed, more emphasis could be placed on broader language concepts and student abilities and attitudes rather than 'surface' exposure to other curricular concepts in social studies and science. Curriculum topics were integrated into language instruction. A small class size (14 students) appeared to foster individual instruction, which was also beneficial to the Basic Literacy students. This was congruent with research that demonstrated that small class size was most beneficial when modified instruction occurred. The combination of curriculum flexibility and small class size as established by the school district provided *time* and proved to have a powerful impact on the Basic Literacy program.

Careful attention to the establishment of Basic Literacy goals and organizational criteria was required at the school district level. Even though reading improved for the Basic Literacy students, student test results remained below the expectations of the program objectives. Overall objectives were to increase literacy skills to a level that enabled the student to succeed in a less restrictive environment and to return students to the regular environment after they completed two years in the program. The Basic Literacy teachers felt that their input would provide more realistic expectations and goals for their students.

It was further acknowledged that as a result of the administrative milieu at the school district level, consistency was lacking between sites, especially with regard to the assessment of Basic Literacy students and the outcomes of the Basic Literacy program. It was believed that these two components of the Basic Literacy program required a more centralized approach.

7. **Overall, were educational stakeholders (administration, staff, students, parents, and community) satisfied with the Basic Literacy program?**

A synthesis of the attitudinal surveys and information garnered from the Basic Literacy teacher interviews indicated that all stakeholders were generally satisfied with the Basic Literacy program. All parties cited that academic improvement was demonstrated, the program provided a valuable service, and expectations were being met in the Basic Literacy program. The Basic Literacy program was considered to be a positive and proactive response for students who demonstrated delayed literacy competencies.

Improvements and concerns noted by the Basic Literacy teachers included the consistent utilization of a classroom amplification system, tightening of the eligibility criteria, and lowering the grade level of entrance (i.e., beginning the program at the Grade 3 level) or continuing the program into the high school levels. These suggested improvements were proposed to strengthen future programming needs for Basic Literacy students.

Conclusions of the Basic Literacy Study

The school district that established the Basic Literacy program in 1997 demonstrated support for students who struggled with reading. For many years the district had recognized that learning to read was a complex process and that specialized assistance was required. Attempts to provide special assistance evolved from an 'adaptation' program and developed into the language-intensive Basic Literacy program. To this end, significant financial and material resources were deployed during the first two years of the program. This research study found that stakeholders perceived that the Basic Literacy program was worthwhile and yielded positive results.

The Basic Literacy students received individualized instruction, were provided with strategies to enhance their literacy abilities, and demonstrated improved reading performance. Writing performance, as noted earlier, was not assessed. This combination appeared to enhance the self-esteem of the students and provided motivation for future literacy successes, thus positively impacting the students' lives. However, it also appears that after several unsuccessful years in school, a two-year program was not sufficient to make up for all literacy deficits. It seems that these students may have required literacy support from the onset of their schooling and would most likely need continued support as they moved through their high school years.

Further, the Basic Literacy teachers seemed to benefit as a result of teaching the Basic Literacy program. The three teachers interviewed for the study were articulate, enthusiastic to increase their knowledge base, and reflective on both successes and areas for growth. It appears that the teachers had new insights into students who were struggling with reading. These insights were likely to expansively impact their teaching performance for many years to come. The Basic Literacy parents appeared to appreciate the attempts of the school system to provide appropriate programming for their children.

Improvement in reading abilities of the Basic Literacy students could not be asserted with any degree of statistical confidence. This was a direct result of the assessment tool that the Basic Literacy teachers were expected to utilize. The HLAT was a districtwide measure employed by all teachers. However, the HLAT did not stand up to statistical rigor, nor was it administered in a consistent manner between 1997 and 1999. As a result, confirmation of teacher predictions (that their students gained in reading performance) could not be asserted with any certainty for the original 118 Basic Literacy students.

Further, the data suggested that reading performance did not improve enough to meet the Basic Literacy program goals. The intent of the Basic Literacy program was to reintegrate the students into the regular program after two years. The findings of this study discovered that only 2 out of 118 students were reintegrated. This was commensurate with a school district report (December, 2000) that stated that after three years of the program only three students had returned to the regular programs and were achieving at or close to grade level.

Given that the Basic Literacy program was piloted in a site-based educational organization, it appears that the administrative milieu of the Basic Literacy program directly impacted the academic results. The teacher interview data identified areas in which piecemeal implementation had occurred. This included variance of class size, continuity between sites, common assessments, and adherence to behavioral criteria. Therefore, it can be asserted that without quality assurance of program development and program implementation, results may diminish.

The Basic Literacy study suggests that vigilance for academic measurement from central office was warranted. Although the HLAT may be sufficient for the regular student population, it appears to be an insufficient measure for special-needs students. The findings suggest that the responsibility of central office should have been to choose a tool and to monitor and provide direction in relation to the tracking of academic data. In this manner administrators of each Basic Literacy site could be more directly accountable to the superintendent with regard to the results they achieved. Otherwise, the findings would indicate that there exists a potential for deterioration of rigor.

In sum, all Basic Literacy stakeholders demonstrated concern about the learning needs of the Basic Literacy students. However, it is apparent through the Basic Literacy investigation, 30 years after Jeanne Chall authored her classic 1967 study, that learning to read remains a great debate. There is no single manner in which to teach reading or to provide remediation for reading deficits. This notion was underscored in Sally's final thoughts:

> I always wonder about the 'what ifs'. I believe we have been very successful in this program, but what if we worked with the students earlier? What if the students are left on their own at high school? What if there is something else we could do? Or what if we have missed something?

Recommendations From the Basic Literacy Study

The school board has recognized that the gap is continuing to widen for students who require assistance with their literacy abilities. The number of students identified as being in need of special literacy programming increased from the original 118 students in 1997 to 470 students in September 2001. As a result, the number of Basic Literacy sites increased from 12 to 22. Given the findings of this research study and the current student enrolment in the Basic Literacy program, it is recommended that the school board reexamine the goals, expectations, and content of the Basic Literacy program.

Possible "surface" recommendations include (a) maintaining the current emphasis on acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills and reduced emphasis on other subject areas such as social studies and science; (b) continuing a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, but providing a more balanced educational program that provides more literacy integration in other content areas and options; (c) beginning the literacy program at an earlier elementary grade level; and (d) continuing the program into the high school years.

It is further recommended that a site-based school board, at the onset of any new educational program, develop a 'criterion of merit' that would identify indicators of success prior to the implementation of the program. Input and reflection of all stakeholders should be sought in the establishment of the criterion of merit. This would ensure that goals and expectations are specific and realistic. If established, the criterion of merit further defines and provides a road map for the evaluation of a program in a scientific and objective manner. Through this process the efficacy of a program can be determined, allowing future directions to evolve in a systematic manner.

A longitudinal study of the Basic Literacy program is also recommended. Tracking the students beyond the first two years of the program would allow for insight into the long-term benefits of the Basic Literacy program. A longitudinal study could incorporate the innovations that have occurred as the Basic Literacy program has continued to evolve. This would most likely include modifications made at the school district level to assist with consistency across Basic Literacy sites and achievement of data collection.

Finally, it is recommended that the school district, which developed the Basic Literacy program, monitor the admission of students to the Basic Literacy program. By doing so, administrators would more closely maintain adherence to the behavioral criteria for enrollment. This assures that students with other learning needs do not dilute the Basic Literacy teachers' primary objectives.

In conclusion, it is known that a proportion of children in schools fail to learn to read adequately and that the seriousness of the problem has garnered attention. Furthermore, we know that this failure to read proficiently emerges early in children's academic lives and has long-term consequences for a range of learners. Fortunately, the fields of reading and related disciplines are at a point in their research and professional knowledge bases to prevent and intercept reading failure for many children. The findings of this Basic Literacy study are testimony to the rich and deep research-based knowledge available to guide the design of effective reading instruction for children who fail to learn from conventional methods and contexts.

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APPENDIX A

PROGRAM GOALS, ORGANIZATION, ENTRANCE CRITERIA, EXPECTATIONS FOR EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD'S LITERACY PROGRAM

PROGRAM GOALS

- To increase literacy skills to a level that enables the student to succeed in a less restrictive environment.
- To improve school skills such as selection of appropriate strategies, organization, planning.
- To help students understand their learning problems and be an advocate for themselves in the classroom.
- To develop positive attitudes towards school and learning.

PROGRAM ORGANIZATION

The program is offered only in designated district centers with teachers and assistants with strong backgrounds in special education and/or reading

- Class size 1/2 or less of regular classes in the school for academic core
- Academics for 2/3 or more of school day
- One teacher (no more than two teachers at junior high) responsible for the academic core to facilitate integration of curricular content with literacy skill development
- Ungraded program; social studies and science topics and concepts chosen for the total group on a rotating yearly schedule
- Emphasis on acquisition of basic concepts and applications rather than higher level thinking skills
- Learning strategies course to replace an option in junior high
- Options chosen to be functionally relevant

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Severe academic delays—generally 3 or more grades below expectancy at elementary, and 4 or more grades below expectancy at junior high. Specifically, below the 1st percentile in two areas and below the 5th percentile in reading comprehension, reading decoding and written language. The recommended psychometrics for these include:

- Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT-R)
- Test of Written Language (TOWL-2)
- Test of Adolescent Language (TOAL-2)
- Test of Early Written Language (TEWL)
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)
- Woodcock Johnson Psychoeducational Battery (WJPEB)
- Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (K-TEA)
- Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT-R)

- Average or low average intellectual ability (Full Scale IQ 80 +/-)
- Acceptable attendance and behavior
- Had 3 or more years of English language instruction

BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Edmonton Public School Board provided a behavioral checklist to each site, which was completed by the referring teacher. The categories generally equate with the following behavioral characteristics:

• Section A - Attention Difficulties	Raw score out of 9
• Section B - Hyperactivity Difficulties	Raw score out of 9
• Section C - Aggressive Difficulties (Behavior Disorder type)	Raw score out of 8
• Section D - Interpersonal Difficulties	Raw score out of 7
• Section E - Aggressive Difficulties (Conduct Disorder type)	Raw score out of 15
• Section F - On-task Behaviors	Raw score out of 9
• Section G - Language Difficulties (verbal)	Raw score out of 8
• Section H - Writing Difficulties	Raw score out of 7

EXPECTATIONS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

- Increase of 1 or more grades in one year of schooling

EXIT CRITERIA

- Students are eligible for a two year term which may be renewed once
- Literacy skills are sufficient to enable the student to function in another program
- Behavior and attendance do not meet acceptable levels

EXPECTATIONS FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- Participate in IEP process and goal setting
- Provide a suitable environment for home work
- Belief in the importance of education

EXPECTATIONS FOR STAFF

Teachers

- Expertise in reading development, language learning
- Special education training (emphasis on learning disabilities) through university courses or extensive professional development

- 5 or more years teaching experience with both regular and special needs programs preferred, new graduates not appropriate
- Wide repertoire of strategies, able to program for a wide range of individual needs
- Patient, understanding, non-confrontational
- Elementary education background preferred at junior high

Program Assistants

- Qualification for level D
- Previous experience with students special needs

APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Literacy Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational training. Has any of your training been specifically related/applicable to the literacy program?
2. Provide a brief overview of your teaching/classroom experiences.
3. How long have you been teaching a literacy class?
4. Generally, what teaching strategies have you attempted to utilize with your students? What strategies (reading) have you found to be the most effective? Why?
5. What do you believe is the biggest learning barrier for these children?
6. What type of assessment strategies do you utilize with these children?
7. Do you feel that these children are demonstrating academic growth? How much growth?
8. Are there any other factors that have affected the achievement of your literacy students?
9. Overall, do you feel the literacy program is effective?
10. What type of improvements, if any, would you like to see in the literacy program?